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THE ART OF KNOWING OURSELVES;
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THE
ART OF KNOWING OURSELVES :

Or, the Looking-Glass which does not deceive.

BY

FR. JOHN PETER PINAMONTI, S.J.

WITH

TWELVE CONSIDERATIONS ON DEATH,

BY

FR. LUIGI LA NUZA, S.J.,

AND FOUR ON ETERNITY,

BY

FR. JOHN BAPTIST MANNI, S.J.

TRANSLATED

BY THE AUTHOR OF ST. WILLIBRORD.

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THE ART OF KNOWING OURSELVES;

OR

THE LOOKING-GLASS WHICH DOES NOT DECEIVE.

PREFACE.

THIS little work of Father John Peter Pinamonti may be truly said to be a golden treatise, containing in brief the sum of spirituality expressed by St. Austin in the well-known words, "Noverim me, noverim Te ; ut contemnam me et amem Te"—*Let me know myself, let me know Thee ; that I may despise myself and love Thee.* This is one of those truths which the intellect assents to but does not so easily comprehend. But so far as it is comprehended it is a proof of progress in perfection. "Abyss," says the Psalmist, "calls upon abyss." The abyss of our nothingness on the abyss of Goodness. Man is nothing. God alone is great and all in all. The spiritual world turns upon these two poles. Father Pinamonti, a profound and most experienced spiritualist, has in this work opened to us abundant matter for meditation on this necessary knowledge of ourselves, and in proportion as we master it and make it our own, we may be called blessed. It is a work which has been long well known and highly valued in Italy under the name of the "True Looking Glass, or the Looking Glass that does not deceive."

Vigil of SS. Peter and Paul, 1877.

- I. On the nothing we are of ourselves in the order of nature.**
- II. On the nothing we are of ourselves in the order of grace.**
- III. On the miserable state of original sin.**
- IV. On actual sin.**
- V. Hell is a great motive for humiliation.**
- VI. Our good works are a cause for humility.**
- VII. On the nothing that we are in comparison with the Saints and with God.**

CONSIDERATION I.

ON THE NOTHING WE ARE OF OURSELVES IN THE
ORDER OF NATURE.

POINT I. *In thy being thou art a nothing.*—Consider that all the art of knowing ourselves consists in “*separating the precious from the vile,*” that is, what is God’s from what is our own, and giving justly to each his due. He who does this, passes a just judgment on himself, and one which God acknowledges for His own, approving the utterance of such a mouth as true, and as if it issued from His own. “*If thou separate the precious from the vile thou shalt be as my mouth.*”¹ According to this principle, consider thyself with only what is thine, and thou wilt see that thou art a *nothing*. What wast thou a hundred years ago? Business went on in the world: they fought, they builded, they planted. The heavens held on their courses, and the seasons returned in order; the sun rose and set, and everything else was the same without thee. Thou hadst not yet body or soul, sense or power, nor hadst thou any merit to deserve to exist. Thou wast less than an ant, less than a grain of sand, thou wert a *mere nothing*. And that which thou wast then thou art now, so far as thou art concerned. Whatever thou art more than this is all from God, and that thou mayest have it, He

¹ Jer. xv. 19.

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must of necessity give it thee in such a manner that it should be impossible for thee or any like to thee to have anything of thyself which is not from Him. "Why, then, *dust and ashes, art thou proud?*"² If I *were of myself* dust and ashes, it would be an intolerable conceit to be proud of it, and yet I am proud being infinitely less—a *mere nothing*.

POINT II. *Thou art nothing in continuing to be.*—Consider again that thou hast no less need of God to continue to exist than thou hadst to be. For at every moment thou wouldst fall back into nothing unless God sustained thee by His omnipotence. "*Carrying all things by the word of His power.*"³ When the sculptor has made a statue, the statue has no longer any need of the sculptor to continue to be; but the creature depends upon the Creator both in its being and in its continuance to be, more than the light depends upon the sun, or the shadow upon the body. "Thou hast fashioned me,"⁴ and not only so, "Thou hast laid Thine hand upon me." Thou must continue to sustain me with Thine arm, and with unbroken perseverance in my preservation. To such a degree are we at every moment a nothing, and all our goods are a baseless fabric, a show of nothing: a nothing in body, a nothing in mind, a nothing in wisdom and in prudence, in fine, we are a complete nothing in all we have within us. "*I saw and there was no man.*"⁵ If I try attentively to fathom the abyss of my being, I find within me a nothing. I am as though I was not. I am like to those who have ceased to be, for with my own efficiency alone I cannot commence to be, and not only so, but after coming

² Eccclus. x. 9.

³ Heb. i. 3.

⁴ Psalm cxxxviii. 5.

⁵ Jer. iv. 25.

into being I cannot of myself continue for one moment to be.

POINT III. *Thou art a nothing in thy works.*—Consider that all operation is in respect to the power working. If the power is none, the work is none. And if thou art continually a nothing in thy being, it is manifest thou art also a nothing in thy operation, for this depends wholly on thy being. Nothing is the sum total of thy being, thy power, and thy merits. The Blessed Catherine of Genoa would not even name herself by name, looking upon herself as a mere nothing. And, indeed, the man is blind who thinks himself some great thing, "*saying that he is something great*,"⁶ while his origin is nothingness, his power mere nothing, and he, with all that is his, is less than a dead dog, and good for nothing but to be despised—of no good but to be trodden under foot.

Practices or Acts to make towards God.

1. Strip thyself in presence of God of every good thing, confessing that it is none of thine, but His alone is the glory. "*Soli Deo honor et gloria.*"

2. Rejoice in being a mere nothing, that God may be all. Be glad that thou has nothing of thine own, and that He is the Fountain-head of all good.

3. At the first motion to any vain complacency have recourse to God, and beseech Him to defend His own honour, and not permit it to be robbed by thee.

4. Deplore thy blindness in having had so high an esteem of thyself. "*I was reduced to nothing, and I knew it not.*"

⁶ Acts viii. 9.

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5. Excite in thyself a reverential fear of God, as of a servant before a master, for, as St. Thomas observes, the reverence of the soul for God is the root of humility.

Acts to make towards thyself.

1. Avoid as far as thou canst all kinds of place and honour, not thinking that thou hast either ability to undertake or virtue to keep it without danger.

2. In chancing to meet with any vile or filthy thing, call to mind that thou art more worthless for thy nothingness, and more filthy for thy sins.

3. Choose for thyself the worst things—in habitation, clothing, and food, as more suitable to thy nothingness and thy merits.

4. Converse more readily with the poor and simple, and see in them what thou art and oughtest to be.

5. Accustom thyself to fear no confusion or shame as being due to thy miseries, and make no more account of the praise or blame of the world than of the praise or blame of a child.

Acts to make towards thy neighbour.

1. The humble man refuses nothing to others that he can give, and makes himself all to all without taking account of his own inclinations, to second those of others.

2. Have a lively compassion for the afflicted, considering that their misfortune might be well thine own since thou deservest it more than they.

3. Be most careful to thank those who have done thee kindness. Gratitude in a great measure springs

from humility, since kindness is the more felt the more we think ourselves unworthy.

4. Be willing to ask information of others, and be ready to receive instruction from all without hiding thy ignorance through pride.

5. Give thanks to those who correct thee, as helping thee to know thyself, and to hold thyself for what thou art.

Prayer to the Eternal Father for the gift of humility.

“O Father of Heaven and Primal Origin of all good, Thine is the being and all the good I possess. Thou hast given it to me, and Thou preservest it to me. In Thee I live and move and have my being. Every moment I am sustained by Thy omnipotence, and without Thee I have not even the possibility of existing. It is, therefore, just and right that I should give to Thee all the glory, and as Thou art my first beginning, so should I return to Thee as my last end. I acknowledge myself as nothing in Thy presence, and I humble myself under Thy power as though I were not. *‘My substance is as nothing before Thee.’* I am exceedingly sorry that I, so miserable a thing, have presumed to sin against Thee, and that having no power of my own to employ in offending Thee, my wicked will has borrowed it from Thee, to use Thy gift against so bountiful a Benefactor. But thou hast not, therefore, ceased to be my Father, and though I have made myself more vile than the dirt which is trodden under foot, ‘Thou art our Father, and we are as clay.’ Show Thyself then a Father to me by Thy

⁷ Isaias lxiv, 8.

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mercy on me, and put forth Thy omnipotence in curing my evils, since Thou hast so long shown Thy patience in supporting me. I am always what I am : always miserable, always blind, always poor, and stripped of every good. Grant me, then, the grace to know that which of myself I am, a nothing in all I possess, a nothing in all I am, who need only union with Thee in charity and subjection by obedience, to come one day to possess all things in Thee. O my God and my All !—Deus meus et omnia.” Amen.

CONSIDERATION II.

ON THE NOTHING WE ARE OF OURSELVES IN THE
ORDER OF GRACE.

POINT I. *The necessity of sanctifying grace.*—Consider that although thou hadst something of thine own in the order of nature, thou oughtest not therefore to esteem thyself anything, as thou art a nothing in the order of grace. God takes so little account of natural gifts that He has left them in a high degree to the devils, though rebels and traitors. Consider, then, what account thou oughtest to take of those very inconsiderable ones He has given to thee. The sinner is often spoken of in Holy Scripture as dust and ashes, but, as a sinner he is called a nothing, because, deprived of grace, he is much more a nothing than if he had never been born. According to this, thou mayest well reckon thyself a nothing. “*He shall be accounted as nothing.*”¹ And thou mayest look upon thyself as an abyss deeper than nothing itself, for

¹ Wisdom ix. 6.

thou of thyself lackest not only sanctifying grace, but also the deserving to receive it. It is true that if this grace be actually in thee thou canst call thyself blessed, for it is the gift of all gifts, and the express participation of the Divine Nature, which makes the soul like to God, and not merely holy. So that one grade of this grace is of more worth than are a thousand worlds ; but yet this treasure, so great, is in thee as in an earthen vessel, "*we carry this treasure in earthen vessels,*" and set by the side of it thy weakness, and thy want of it is made more apparent. For the rest, grace, for we speak of first grace, is all from God, and all of God, proceeding from the omnipotence of God, and purchased by the Blood of the Redeemer, and the powers of the soul have no part in so precious a gift, being able, it is true, to dispose themselves for its infusion, but not to work it out by their own operation, for this is wholly of the Most-High. "*Create in me a clean heart, O God.*" So that, in fine, what thou art of thyself without grace is "*a land of darkness and of the shadow of death, where there is no order, but everlasting horror dwells,*"² an utter misery, more wretched than even not to be.

POINT II. *The necessity of actual grace.*—Consider that thy poverty stops not here, since besides the necessity of sanctifying grace thou hast extreme need of actual grace. It is not enough that the eye be sound, to see well there must also be light to move it and assist it to form sight. So it is not enough that the soul be made sound by habitual grace, to come into operation it also requires each time a supernatural assistance to illumine the mind and to strengthen the will. Without this aid, through the

² Job x. 22.

mere ordinary and general concurrence of nature, works morally good of an ordinary kind can be done, but the whole law cannot be kept nor extraordinary difficulties be overcome, just as a sick person can move about a little but cannot do those things which require much exertion. Moreover, these same works done with the ordinary concurrence of nature cannot serve as a disposition to sanctifying grace and to glory, for since the means must be proportionate to the end, that which is purely in the order of nature cannot dispose to a supernatural end elevated incalculably above the natural state. According to this, what can be said to prove more clearly the abyss of thy impotency? With thy natural powers, even if they were thine, and came not from God, thou canst do no good thing to deserve, or to dispose thee to deserve, eternal life. "*Without Me you can do nothing*,"³ says our Lord. Thou canst not even have a good thought that can be the beginning of thy salvation, nor of thy own power hast thou anything but nothingness and sin. "*Man has not ought of himself but lies and sin*," is an article of faith defined by the Council of Orange. sess. 7. A sucking babe if he be dirty cannot cleanse himself, if he fall he cannot rise, if on foot he cannot stand, if cold he cannot warm, and if hungry he cannot feed himself. If persecuted he cannot defend himself nor even call for aid in his wants, he cannot even know them, but in all these necessities he must have the succour of his mother, or else he is lost. Such and still more wretched is thy state, and canst thou then find room for pride? Cling to the neck of thy loving mother Divine grace, and clasp thy arms around her, recom-

³ St. John xv. 4.

mending thyself to her most heartily that she forsake thee not. "*Oh, forsake me not utterly.*"

POINT III. *The necessity of Final Grace.*—Consider that thine impotence is ever more and more apparent in this, that such continued aid of grace is necessary not only to begin a good work and to continue it, but also to bring it to an end, and is most of all necessary for final perseverance, which is the greatest of all the favours of God, and is that which puts us in possession of eternal happiness. "As God works in us that we may come to Him, so He works in us that we depart not from Him."⁴ Forasmuch as the having lived long in a good life and having acquired much virtue together with having done great things for God, cannot secure us without a new grace; and although they can of condignity merit heaven, they cannot of condignity merit perseverance, which will always be a mere gift and the pure liberality of our Lord, without the aid of whose special grace as we should fail at every step, so much more should we fail at the last when the danger of loss is the greatest. It is now six thousand years since the air has each day been illumined by the sun, and yet the moment the face of the sun is turned from it, it is suddenly darkened and cannot keep the light given to it even for a moment, so that it would seem more just to say, not that the air is luminous but that the sun is luminous in the air. And so the same may be said of you, God remains with you. "*Not I, but the grace of God with me.*" Of thyself thou art so weak that if He turn His face from thee thou art lost. "*Thou didst turn Thy face from me and I was troubled.*" Oh, the abyss then of the vanity of man! "*All is vanity.*" Every man is

⁴ St. Augustine, *De dono persever.* l. ii. c. 7.

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but vain, and at every moment has need of support to continue. He confides in himself and yet he knows not if he will persevere. "*Where then is thy boasting?* It is excluded."⁵

Practices or acts to make towards God.

1. Before every good action recommend thyself to God, having diffidence of doing it well without new succours of grace from Him.

2. After every action done, give thanks to God for all the good, accustoming thyself to acknowledge all as the benefit of His grace, and do homage to Him, casting down thy crown with the ancients before the throne.

3. Often ask pardon for having corresponded so ill to the aids He has given thee to do well, confessing from thy heart that grace has not been wanting to thee but that thou hadst been wanting to grace.

4. Make many acts of faith of the nothingness thou art, especially in the order of grace, declaring that thou standest so long as thou art kept from falling.

5. Conceive a great wonder that God deals so lovingly with a creature so base as thyself, and say with David, "Lord, what is man that Thou dost magnify him and set Thy heart upon him?"

Acts towards thyself.

1. Avoid being or appearing singular, lest you be esteemed anything out of the common or ordinary.

2. Never withdraw thyself from the burthens that are borne by others to avoid inconvenience or services due to them.

⁵ Rom. iii. 27.

3. Fear lest grace be withdrawn from thee for thy ingratitude and little correspondence to it.

4. Rejoice at the natural defects thou perceivest in thyself as matter of and aids to humility.

5. Remember that he who praises thee deceives thee if he contributes to the false idea that the good is yours which is of grace. "*My people, they who call thee happy deceive thee.*"⁶

Towards thy neighbour.

1. Choose as much as possible the last place among others, but without show of doing so, as being the most unworthy.

2. Open thy conscience to thy spiritual father as a sick man to his physician, generously overcoming all shame.

3. Despise no one, however great a sinner he may be, and say to thyself, "How do I know whether he may not be saved and I not?"

4. Never assume the master over others, nor make show of being more learned than they.

5. When thou hast choice, leave the best to others in food, furniture, and apparel, as being less deserving than they.

Prayer to God the Son for Humility.

"O Divine Word, the Light and the Truth, behold me a miserable creature who come before Thee with sorrow and confusion of face confessing my folly. Thou, the Eternal Wisdom, through the excess of Thy infinite love, didst become our Wisdom and our Justice that we might boast of nothing except in Thee. And yet in my folly and ignorance I have

⁶ Isaias iii. 12.

not known Thee the Author of all my good, but have taken pride in it as my own, while it could only come from Thee. What can I say but confess it that if I pride myself upon it I am wholly without understanding, and all darkness and ignorance. *'I am the most foolish of men and wisdom is not with me.'*⁷ Thine is the grace, because Thou hast merited it for me as Man, and it proceeds from Thee as God, and without grace I am less than nothing, and better are those things which never have been and never will be. Therefore to Thee is due all the glory, and to me only confusion. But come Thou Who alone canst say that by Thy power and might Thou hast trodden on the necks of the proud. *'On the necks of the proud and haughty by My own power have I trod.'* Come Thou and crush the head of this my detestable pride, that all the poison of it may gush out. Illumine my mind that it may know its insufficiency for all good, and grant that I may ever give to Thee alone all the honour, that so persevering in virtue and ever assisted by Thy grace, I may hope to come to praise Thee for ever in Thy glory." Amen.

CONSIDERATION III.

ON THE MISERABLE STATE OF ORIGINAL SIN.

POINT I. Consider the first sequel of thy nothingness in the miseries of original sin, in which condition thou wast when thou first camest into existence, before thou wast in thy nurse's arms, and wast locked in the embrace of sin as a prisoner of death, swathed in bonds which no powers of nature could break

⁷ Prov. xxx. 2.

asunder. "*In iniquities*," says holy David with shame, "*I was conceived*," that is in the bosom of iniquity as truly as in my mother's womb. Ponder, then, awhile this primal shame of thy origin—and as the proud begin their praises with the renown of their ancestry, so do thou with more justice begin the lowliness of thine from thy first forefather Adam. It is held to be a great disgrace to come of a shameful lineage. The son of an attainted traitor does not hold converse with others, but goes into voluntary exile from every country where he is known for what he is. Now art thou not the son of the first man that was ever traitor and rebel to His Master and Maker? The first who at one felon blow betrayed all the human race? "*Thy father was an Amorrhite and thy mother a Cethite.*"¹ Thy father that is was a rebel, and thy mother a fool. And yet there are men with the title of most noble who forget that there is this sinful and shameful blood in their veins. "Serpents, generation of vipers," these are the titles that are more suitable; for if our first parents were by the poison of their sin, vipers and serpents, what race could they produce other than poisonous like themselves? Thanks for evermore to our Lord Jesus Christ, Who in holy Baptism has made for us a bath of His most precious Blood to wash away this stain of shame and to cure this malignity of our nature. But this is all the free mercy of our Lord and the unworthiness is all our own. Therefore to Him be all the glory and to us confusion of face. "*Tibi Domine justitia, nobis autem confusio.*"²

POINT II. *The darkness of the intellect.*—Consider that besides the shame of it, the state of original sin

¹ Ezech. xvi. 3.

² Daniel ix.

brings with it a most strange disorder in the whole composition of our being. First, a prodigious ignorance of the understanding, with a more thick darkness than fell upon the land of Egypt. In the truths of nature it may be said thou art in the dark, for thou hast the eyes of the mind wherewith to see, but for want of light thou knowest but little. In supernatural truths thou art stone-blind, for without the grace of God thou hast not the power to conceive even one good thought to be the beginning of thy salvation as we have already considered. So much so that thou art not only dark but darkness itself—mere night and blindness. “*You were sometime darkness;*” thou knewest nothing else but to prefer the creature to the Creator, to love the temporal and despise the Eternal, to find the road to perdition and to lose the path of salvation. “*Wise to do evil,*”³ and yet for that little natural science thou hast, for that little remnant of human prudence, thou esteemest thyself wise; thou lookest with an air of pride and disdain upon all that contradict thee, as though an Ethiopian were to think himself a paragon of whiteness for the whiteness of his eyes and his teeth. “His arrogance and his indignation are more than his power.”⁴ Oh, how far thy imagined excellence surpasses the reality of what thou art!

POINT III. *The malice of thy will.*—Consider that the darkness caused in thee by original sin is not the darkness of the night which passes away, but of the eclipse which extinguishes. To the ignorance of mind is joined a strange perversity of will, which has neither limit nor moderation. So that God alone can fathom or comprehend it. “The

³ Jer. iv. 22.⁴ Isaiah xvi. 6.

heart of all is evil and inscrutable, who can know it? I, the Lord, am the searcher of hearts.”⁵ Whereas we can never fully come to comprehend the poison we carry within us. Now this malice consists in a strong inclination of the will towards itself, so as to make no account of God in contenting itself. It consists in an incredible lust of concupiscence in following after pleasure without ever saying it is enough. It consists in an extreme weakness of the irascible part in following out what is just and right together with an extreme boldness in pursuing what is pleasant. “The sense and thoughts of the heart of man are inclined to evil from his youth.”⁶ A great mass of stone suspended in the air has a strong proclivity to fall, but this can be stayed by a greater natural force. A similar and yet greater proclivity hast thou to fall headlong into every evil, so that nature alone suffices not to restrain thee, but thou needest the aid of grace with a continued and ever renewed mercy upon thee. “He hath confirmed His mercy on them that fear Him.” To conceive then of this thy condition truly, think that thou art that unfortunate man who left Jerusalem to go to Jericho and fell among thieves, by whom he was stripped and wounded and left half dead upon the road. By the sin of Adam thou didst leave the city of God to go to the city of rebels, and falling among the thieves of hell wast spoiled of grace and original justice and receivedst these four deadly wounds of ignorance, malice, weakness, and concupiscence, so that with nothing else surviving in thee but a darkened understanding and a feeble free will, there was nothing for thee but without fail to die eternally, had not the grace of God

⁵ Jer. xvii. 9.

⁶ Genesis viii. 21.

cured thy wounds by the medicine of His wounds, though thine be so festering that even with His Divine remedy they are scarce healed. And in this state in which thou mightest with more reason despair thou art still proud, and thou sayest, "I am rich and full and in need of nothing, and thou knowest not that thou art in want and miserable and poor and blind and naked."⁷ Thou thinkest thyself rich in the gifts of nature and full of the gifts of grace, without need of continual aid to keep them; but God declares against thee a sentence quite the contrary, saying that thou art miserable in thyself and miserable as thou seemest to others, poor by the loss of grace and original justice, blind through ignorance, and naked in the want of every virtue. Which of these sentences is true? Which is deceived, God or thou? "In the hand of Chanaan are deceitful balances, and he saith I am made rich."⁸

Practices or acts to make towards God.

1. Place thyself in the presence of God as an abandoned foundling child, born out of due time, and imagine that looking upon thee in His mercy He says, "Seeing thee in thy blood I said to thee, Live. I have said to thee, in thy blood Live."⁹

2. Protest before Him that thou hast no cure for these deadly wounds, except He lay His hand upon thee. "Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed. Save me and I shall be saved."¹⁰

3. Fear lest the gifts of God become to thee through thy fault the occasion of greater damnation.

⁷ Apoc. iii. 17.

⁸ Osee. xii. 7.

⁹ Ezech. xvi.

¹⁰ Jer. xvii. 14.

Since the more thou art bound to serve Him the less thou servest Him.

4. If God deprive thee of all sensible consolation enter more profoundly into thyself confessing that thou dost not merit the sweets that belong to the friends of God.

5. Restore to God all the glory of which thou hast robbed Him by vain self-complacency, saying, "The right hand of the Lord hath done might."

Acts towards thyself.

1. Consider thyself unworthy of all the good thou hast, and of all thou hast not, confessing that thou deservest not the food thou dost eat nor the air thou breathest, &c.

2. Have a care to do no good nor to leave any undone out of human respect.

3. Desire to be without honour, that so thou mayest mount to the desire of contempt which is the highest grade of humility.

4. Be content to die to the affections of all, that no one have love or remembrance of thee, "*tanquam mortuus a corde.*" Because knowing that God alone is to be loved thou hast desired to appear good to gain love.

5. Never cease to reprove thyself for thy faults, and to reproach thyself for thy failings, that so thou mayest arrive at a hearty contempt of thyself, and to be to thyself insufferable, "*tibimet ipsi gravis.*"

Acts towards thy neighbour.

1. Except when obliged by duty or charity, be ever silent of the faults of others and ready to praise their virtues.

2. Take no revenge except by doing a kindness, acknowledging thyself worthy of all ill usage, and that what would be wrong to do to others is rightly done to thee.

3. If thou mayest not yield the preference to others in external things, give it to them at least in thy heart, thinking thyself unworthy of their company.

4. Be assured that thou hast no worse counsellor than thyself, and therefore be ready to follow the opinion of others rather than thy own.

5. Laugh not at contempt out of pride as not making account of the persons who blame or despise thee, thus being proud under show of humility.

Prayer to the Holy Ghost for Humility.

“O Eternal Love, Spirit of the Comforter, gift above all gifts, behold this abyss of miseries that invokes Thee the abyss of mercies ; alleviate his woes, cure his wounds, wash away his guilt, *‘lava quod est sordidum, riga quod est aridum, sana quod est saucium.’* Thou Who from the beginning didst rest upon the waters and give life and fecundity to that first beginning of creation, hast by a more stupendous miracle given life and the fruitfulness of Thy grace to my soul in the waters of Baptism. But I in my foolishness made like to the beasts, and not understanding the price of Thy gifts, have thrown away this grace, and to the hereditary debt of original sin have added iniquities of my own, redoubling thereby my natural weakness, and making my chains heavier and opening my wounds. I deserve neither pity nor pardon. I deserve none in very deed. But Thou Who art greater than our wants, and in our greatest need showest Thy bounty, abandon not this poor

wretch, who without Thee can have no good. '*Sine tuo numine, nihil est in homine, nihil est innoxium,*' and since one of my greatest miseries is the ignorance of my own misery, compassionate my horrible blindness and discover to me with a ray of Thy light how miserable I am before Thee. Give me a share of that esteem Thou hast of me, of my nothingness, of my sins, of my ignorances, of my weakness, of my malice. Blessed shall I be if Thou impartest to me this grace, that so in Thy light, seeing light here I may hereafter be admitted to the joys of heaven, there to participate in Thy holiness, Thy blessedness, and to be for ever made like to Thee." Amen.

CONSIDERATION IV.

ON ACTUAL SIN.

POINT I. *On past sin.*—Consider how much worse than nothing thou art, for the past sins of thine own. Mind of man cannot conceive the utter vileness of the state to which a sinner reduces himself in the eyes of God. It were better for him to be a poisonous toad, a viper, or a deadly serpent—nay, it were better for him not to be. "*Better were it for that man if he had not been born.*" All kinds of infamy are concentrated in an act of sin, and by committing it we do the most shameful thing, the foulest treason, the most detestable perfidy that can be. "*How art thou become vile exceedingly, repeating the ways,*"¹ says Almighty God, for the excessive shamefulness of a sinful soul, which so much the more redoubles its

¹ Jer. ii. 36.

shame the more it continues to add sin to sin. And although thou mayest humbly hope that thine old offences are forgiven thee, still thou art not secure; and though thou hast received pardon, and thy sins are blotted out, yet this is due solely to the grace of God, and not to thee. But ponder for a while what thou art with thine own work. "They are become abominable as those things which they have loved."² Thy will is as detestable in the sight of God as those shameful things it has loved more than God. This is the state in which thou hast put thyself, and in which thou mayest recognise what thou art *of thyself*, since thy pardoned sins are still ever thine own, and thou oughtest by good right to detest any, even the slightest fault in thyself, more than the most grievous in another. "Seemeth it a little thing to you that you have sinned?"³ Is it a light excess that thou hast once betrayed thy God? It is enough to have been once a sinner to be ashamed of thyself for ever, and not to dare to lift up thy face for thy dishonour. They say that Simon who received our Lord at a feast had been cured by Christ of his leprosy, but still kept the name of "The Leper" in memory of what he had been. According to this thou art still all wounds and infamy. "Disgrace once incurred lasts for ever."⁴ So says human law, and if the law of God blot out the shame of sin for the penitent, it counsels thee ever to remember the state in which thou wast by thy own fault, and in which thou art not now, but only by grace and mercy.

POINT II. *Present sin.*—Consider that thou needest not have recourse to past sin to humble thyself, the

² Osee. ix. 10.

³ Jos. xxii. 16.

⁴ Lex. Civ. iii.

present is more humiliating. If thou sawest with attentive eyes the actual state of thy soul, it would seem to thee that thou hadst before thee a Job on his dunghill, with running sores from head to foot. "From the sole of the feet to the crown of the head there is no soundness in him, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores." All thy senses, all thy powers stream with rottenness and imperfections for the countless number of defects that flow from them, and make thee like a living corpse consumed alive by worms. "Our malice is so great," said the Blessed Catherine of Genoa, "that if God looked upon it, He could not bestow upon us any good, for it is unspeakable and incredible to one who has not seen it." And on one occasion, when the same saint was shown the detestable nature of the least act against the will of God, she says that she had well nigh died, and had not that night quickly passed, "though her heart had been of adamant, it would have burst asunder." Now of such faults how many are there in thee? The number of them is uncertain, as well as the weight. "Who understandeth his sins?"⁵ And yet thou wishest to be considered by all as having and being something good. Thou art like the quicksilver, which is the heaviest of metals, and yet would ever mount and rise above the others. "Abominable and vile is man who drinketh iniquity as water."⁶ Behold thy portrait—good for nothing by nature, by thy past sins abominable, by thy present feeding on iniquity, and drinking it in freely; and yet thou art proud.

POINT III. *Sins that might have been and may be.*—Consider that thou art a very great sinner, not only for thy past and present sins, but also for all those

⁵ Psalm xviii.

⁶ Job. xv. 16.

thou mightest or wouldst commit if God did not help thee to avoid them. "To Thy grace I owe it if there be sins that I have not done," says the humble St. Austin in his confessions.⁷ All the sins we do not do are a benefit of the grace of God, purchased for us by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. For in truth every man by his corrupt nature, and his own naughtiness has in himself enough for what is needed to produce every enormity of wickedness. Therefore, thou who in good art so feeble that thou canst not of thine own strength take so much as one step, art in evil a giant so huge that thou couldst take upon thy back the sins of the whole world. Hence, imagine that thou art held suspended by the hair of thy head over the abyss of every monstrous crime, and that to fall into it thou needest nothing but to be let go. There is no need of any miracle: by merely letting thee alone God can do worse for thee than if he were to annihilate thee. It suffices that He do not do thee a new benefit to which thou hast no title, except that thou hast oftentimes ill deserved it. It suffices that He permit the devil to tempt thee with all his power. It suffices, in fine, that He leave thee to thy own free will, and behold thou art fallen headlong into every evil. According to this thou oughtest to look upon thyself as in the condition thou wouldst be in hadst thou upon thee the sins of the whole world; for on thy part thou hast, having in thy soul the capital of misery, which is sufficient for the commission of them all. He who is liable to epilepsy counts himself as sick, though he be not in a fit of it, for he has that corrupt humour within him which is capable of causing him at any moment to fall headlong. The

⁷ Lib. ii. c. 7.

first name given to the earth was "The Dry." "God called the Dry, Earth." Not because it was then dry, for it was buried beneath the waters, but because it was in itself dry, and would without water be dry. So without the aid of grace thou art a new, and it may be, a worse antichrist. By the light of this truth be proud if thou canst.

Acts to be made towards God.

1. Place thyself in the presence of God as the publican who for shame durst not lift up his eyes to heaven, and say often, "God be merciful to me the greatest of sinners."

2. When thou art praised call to mind the very different judgment our Lord makes of thee. He who is "praised by men while Thou blamest, will not be acquitted by men when Thou condemnest," says St. Austin.

3. Pray God often not to abandon thee to thy evil passions: "To an irreverent and a froward spirit deliver me not."⁸

4. Look upon thyself in the sight of God as a fetid pool which then only does not infect when it is not stirred. The sins thou committest not, are either those to which thou art not tempted or for which thou lackest occasion.

5. Accept with good will all labour, as a slave who bows beneath the lash which he has well deserved. "I will sustain the anger of the Lord, for I have sinned unto Him."⁹

Acts towards thyself.

1. Have a care not to speak of thyself without

⁸ Eccclus. xxiii. 9.

⁹ Mich. vii. 9.

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good reason for it; much more not to set up thyself for an example of what is to be done.

2. To speak in a low tone of voice has ever been considered by the saints as a sign and a practice of humility.

3. Fly as much as thou mayest the company of those who praise thee much and esteem thee above others, so shalt thou not foster thy pride.

4. Hide not thy defects, especially thy natural ones, that cannot be cause of scandal.

5. Force thyself to have a holy hatred of thyself, as one that is good for nothing except to do evil unless the Lord hindered it. Think that every one who knew thee well would hate thee.

Practices towards thy neighbour.

1. Never contend with any one. Having given thy reasons with modesty, give way, esteeming it a great victory to conquer thyself.

2. When thou yieldest make no show of yielding purposely, but as though of necessity, having nothing further to say.

3. When any one is displeasing to thee in conversation, remember how much greater is the disgust thou givest our Lord by thy faults, and yet He bears with thee.

4. If thou art treated as well as thy brethren be astonished, as thinking thyself a daw among the pigeons.

5. Watch over the least motion of envy. Besides the malice of pride from which it springs, envy has the malice of hatred in it, which it gives rise to, and thus its malice is doubly great.

Prayer to Jesus our Redeemer for the gift of humility.

“O my most amiable Jesus, who for the redemption of mankind wouldst appear less than man, covered with confusion and filled with reproaches, I bless and will bless for ever Thy great mercy, by which Thou hast so long endured my sins, and, what is still more intolerable, my pride. Thou hast in very deed need of no less than infinite patience to bear with me, so poor and yet so proud—“*pauperem et superbum.*” But Thy goodness has not been content with only enduring, Thou hast gone far beyond this, O my only Good. Do Thou, then, go further also, and free me from my malice, making me as humble as I am vile—“*Ab homine iniquo et doloso erue me,*” free me from myself, the *man of sin*, and deluder of myself. Enlighten my blindness with Thy truth, so that I may see myself as I am in Thy eyes, an abyss of weakness and of sin. Thou hast already begun the work by the faith, complete and perfect it with the illumination of my soul. Despise not this my prayer, though it well deserves to be despised. Thou seest that my malice is so great that it would suffice to infect all men with its bad example didst Thou not hinder me with Thy grace. Nor would hell be punishment enough for my sins. There should be a hell expressly for me. And yet I do not know myself, but pretend to be honoured and set above others. I need, therefore, Thy light to illumine my darkness, and Thy mighty aid also that I fall not for the time to come into the abyss of all evil. For this Thy aid I call upon Thee, and for the sake of Thy precious Blood and through Thy promises I hope in thy great mercy, by which Thou art always ready to do more than Thou art asked. Grant me my petition, and so will

I praise Thee for ever and ever, because Thou hast bestowed so great a grace upon one so unworthy." Amen.

CONSIDERATION V.

HELL IS A GREAT MOTIVE FOR HUMILIATION.

POINT I. *Thou hast deserved to be sentenced to it.*—Consider the shame of some notorious malefactor convicted of his crimes and condemned to the gallows, and then look upon thy shame and consider how much greater it is to have been condemned to hell as the thief of God's glory. Certainly it is shame much greater in the sight of God and His angels, as it is punishment greater, to lie for ever trampled on by devils, than to end one's life by the hand of the executioner. Still more so if the condemned can allege some excuse, and can call in question whether he be truly as guilty as he is held in the eyes of human justice. But in thy case there is no such doubt. It is certain that thou hast deserved that grievous punishment, and in this thou hast true cause for just confusion, for to be punished is not so great an evil as it is to have deserved to be punished. Thou hast been convicted before the justice of God, which cannot err—nay, thou wast upon the ladder, so to speak, about to be pushed off; and this only was wanting to consign thee to perdition, while to so many others this last push has been given, and they are lost for ever. "Except the Lord had helped me, within a little and my soul had dwelt in hell." O habitation of woe, house of lamentation! O intolerable confusion! And yet thou complainest that enough is

not made of thee. All contempt that does not amount to hell and damnation is less than thy deserts. Say, then, with confusion of face, "I have sinned and indeed done evil, and I have not received according to that which I have deserved."¹

POINT II. *Thou knowest not if the sentence be reversed.*—Consider that thou art not sure that this thy sentence has been recalled. God showed to St. Teresa the place in hell to which she would have fallen if she had continued in certain conversations and affections which were not sinful, but dangerous. Thine also, and with more reason, has been assigned to thee amid that horrid prison of darkness in company with the poor lost who will be for ever without attaining their end. But how knowest thou whether that abode of misery does not await for thee still? How knowest thou whether that sentence of damnation be cancelled, or whether thy name is blotted out of the Book of Life? "Man knoweth not whether he be worthy of love or hatred."² Man knows not whether he be acquitted or condemned before God. And yet in this doubt he is puffed up with pride, and judges his fellows, who have perhaps a better cause than his own. "I am a man *seeing his own poverty in the rod of His indignation.*"³ There is no better way of knowing one's own poverty than by looking on the debt contracted with the justice of God. If slaves are reckoned of no account by law, "*Servi pro nullis habentur,*" how much more reason has one condemned to never-ending punishment, and who knows not whether he be pardoned, to account himself as nothing?

¹ Job xxxiii. 27.

² Eccus. ix. 1

³ Lam. iii. 1.

POINT III. *Thou mayest again deserve it and have it executed upon thee.*—Consider that although the punishment due to thy crimes may be forgiven thee, yet the pardon is solely due to the mercy of God. Thou art still what thou wast, a reprobate and a child of hell, and mayest say, “Hell is my home.” It not only has been but is my dwelling place, for I have built it for myself by my sins, nor was there power in any creature to prevent me from going to dwell in those “everlasting burnings.” Therefore there is the more reason, though by the grace of God thou hast received forgiveness for the past, that thou be not sure of not being condemned at some future time without reprieve, through thy malice. O truth, which stops the way to every vain thought! O abyss of Divine judgment, at which he who humbleth not himself either has no wit or no faith! To-day there is a thief, and condemned to death, yet in a brief hour he shall receive from Christ upon the Cross the reward of Paradise. There is an Apostle, and one who casts out devils, and yet briefly shall end his life in despair, and be trampled for ever under foot by devils. Oh, I repeat, the abyss of fearful judgments! How canst thou despise any one in this great uncertainty of life and death eternal? How canst thou esteem thyself more than another? Perhaps in thy neighbours thou despisest an elect to the kingdom of heaven, and esteamest in thyself a reprobate child of hell. Thou art but as far from falling into that precipice as thou art far from sin, and thou art but as far from sin as thou art from thyself. If then thou fallest into that pit, what will be thy employment for ever? It will be with those unfortunates to detest thy pride, and to say hourly with them, weeping inconsolably, but then

too late, "What hath pride profited us, and the boasting of riches what hath it brought us?"⁴ That pride which profited not even for the brief moment of time, is now our torment for eternity!

Practices or acts towards God.

1. Thank God often for His patience in bearing with thee so long, and imagine that thy sins reduce Him to a strait of bearing with thee any longer. "*The Lord could not bear with you longer for the malice of your hearts.*"⁵

2. When thou receivest an injury look not upon the person who wrongs thee, but lift up thine eyes to God, Who makes use of that instrument to humble thee. "*The Lord hath bid him curse me.*"⁶

3. Say at times to thyself what would be left to thee if God took at once from thee all His gifts. "*Could a creature be found that had no part in the goodness of God, it would be as evil as He is good.*"⁷

4. Consider how detestable thou art in the sight of God for thy pride. "*Every proud man is an abomination to the Lord.*"⁸ And therefore humble thyself, that thou art not humble nor knowest how to be so.

5. Force thyself to conceive what confusion thou wilt have before the judgment-seat of God when, opening thy eyes now closed by pride, thou shalt find how naked thou art of all good.

Acts towards thyself.

1. Humble thyself beneath the very demon who was damned for a single sin, and not had the grace

⁴ Wisdom v. 8.

⁵ Jer. xlv. 22.

⁶ Kings ii. 16.

⁷ Blessed Catherine of Genoa, *in vita*, c. xiii.

⁸ Prov. xvi. 5.

given him to rise again from it, whereas thou, with so many graces given thee, hast multiplied thy sins.

2. Be confounded to think how exactly thou wouldst be served by others while thou art thyself so bad a servant of God.

3. Exercise thyself gladly in humble duties, which is the best of all means for acquiring humility. "*Humiliations*," says St. Bernard, "*conduce to humility, as patience does to peace.*"⁹

4. Do not be too proud to learn from others, but show thyself pleased when any one teaches thee.

5. Perform willingly all penances given thee, and humble thyself as guilty in performing them.

Acts towards thy neighbour.

1. Offer the labours, prayers, and merits of thy brethren together with the little good thou dost, that, like bad money, it may pass among good coin.

2. Correct no one when it is thy duty to do it, without considering thyself in thy heart more faulty than he.

3. In obeying, have a care not to condemn in thy mind the order given thee, for that is to submit in body and to act as superior in mind.

4. Compare thyself with no one except to thy disadvantage, considering in thy neighbour that which is of God, in thyself that which is thy own.

5. When corrected humble thyself, though thou be not in fault, considering that though thou hast not this fault, thou hast others greater than it.

Prayer to our Lord Jesus Christ as Teacher of Humility.

"O my Lord Jesus Christ, exalter of the humble

⁹ Epist. lxxxi.

and the giver of glory to those who are lowly in their own eyes, I confess myself bound to give infinite thanks to Thy love, by which Thou hast been pleased to become Master to the whole world, to teach it a virtue so little known to it, and so necessary for its humility, without which, as Thou hast declared, we cannot enter into Thy kingdom. Blessed be Thy Divine mouth, which so often and in so many ways was opened to teach us this road to salvation. But what will it profit me that Thou hast given this sublime lesson, if I by my dulness do not come to understand it? Give me not only the lesson, but give me also the understanding to comprehend the truth of it. *'Da mihi intellectum ut sciam testimonia tua.'* Give me a mind capable of comprehending what it is to have so often justly deserved hell, and yet to be delivered from it by Thy pure mercy. *'From me is my perdition ;'* in Thee alone is my help. Of myself I am a castaway, lost and reprobate. Whatever there is in me more or better than this, is the gift of Thy mercy, that has borne with me, and woe to me if it bear not with me still ! for with the mere weight of my malice I shall consummate my ruin, nor shall I stop until I fall actually into that pit of eternal fire. *'Thou didst turn Thy face from me, and I was troubled.'* So Thou hast taught me, and having this Thy teaching I will give place no more to pride, which is so hateful in Thy eyes. Let all creatures know that I am to myself only a spur to speed on the way to ruin, and a guide to conduct to the everlasting pit. To Thee alone is the glory due, O God my Saviour, and to me confusion of face. Grounded on this sure truth, I shall hope in its due time for that reward which is hid from the eyes of the proud and revealed to the humble hereafter in heaven." Amen.

CONSIDERATION VI.

OUR GOOD WORKS ARE A CAUSE FOR HUMILITY.

POINT I. *On account of that in them which is wholly of God.*—Consider thy extreme misery, since the very riches of thy good works make thee in a manner more poor. So that the more thou doest for God the more thou oughtest to be humble before Him. And first, for that which is His own in every act of virtue. To do well thou hast need first of the gift of being, which is wholly of God thy Creator, and for it alone thou owest Him infinite glory and infinite thanksgiving, for having drawn thee out of nothing by His infinite power. Moreover, thou hast need of thy faculties which are also the work of the Lord thy God. Thou needest the concurrence of God as the first cause and Author of nature, without which the secondary causes could no more work than if they had never been. Moreover, still thou needest the aid of God as the Author of grace, to give thee supernatural assistance, so that strengthened by this superior power thou mayest come to know and to will what is good. Lastly, thou needest sanctifying grace to make thy work meritorious for eternal life, and all these things together must not only be given thee, but must be continued to thee during the whole time thou art engaged in working; so that if but one failed thee thy work would also fail. See, then, how it is out of all reason that thou primest thyself on a good work done. Thou mayest well rejoice because a good work is a great good; but thou canst not boast of it. A mendicant is glad if he receives a more abundant alms, but he is not vain of it nor despises his fellows;

for if he is better provided than they, it is because he was the poorest, the most ragged, and the most abject of them all. "Who am I, Thy servant, that Thou hast looked upon a dead dog like me."¹

POINT II. *On account of that which is God's, and that which is thine.*—Consider what it is of thy own which thou hast in a good work. Thou on thy part givest thy co-operation with grace, and the good use of thy powers in the execution of the thing. But this is also the gift of God. Not that we do not truly will or do the good which we do, for else it would not be ours, "but because," says St. Austin, "we neither will nor do without the assistance of God."² Where, then, is the matter for boasting? "Shall the axe boast against him who uses it?"³ It is true thou canst glory in the Lord for the free will thou usest in doing well, a thing which cannot belong to an instrument which is dead and is not free, but thou canst not glory apart from the Lord, usurping that which is not thine. "He that glories let him glory in the Lord," but not without Him. Besides, albeit the good actions are partly God's and partly our own, yet they are not so much of account or value for what they have of ours as for what they have from God. Imagine a great prince who espouses a poor country girl, the sons of that marriage are most noble and heirs to the throne, but they are not noble or heirs on the part of the mother, it is only on the part of the father. For so far as concerns the mother they are rather ignoble, and therefore they boast of their father's lineage, but of their mother's they are silent or ashamed. So are the good works done from the

¹ 2 Kings ix. 8.

² *De orat. Christi*, c. xxiv.

³ Isaias x. 15.

happy union of Divine aid and the co-operation of our own will. So far as they spring from man they are vile in condition, and deserving rather of shame than esteem. "By the grace of God I am what I am."⁴

POINT III. *On account of that in them which is all our own.*—Consider what a motive for humiliation, thou shouldst draw from thy good works, for that in them which is all thy own, that is to say for the faults and imperfections in them. Vinegar seen with the naked eye seems pure, but seen through a microscope is swarming with worms. The little light we have makes us look upon our actions as perfect, but if God gave us a ray of His Divine light, we should see in them a heap of defects, so great is the selfishness we mingle with them, the vanity, the lack of good intention, the love of self and our convenience. Father Alvarez, esteemed by St. Teresa inferior to none of the servants of God in his time, received from God the grace of a most exalted intelligence to perceive his good works under the figure of a bunch of grapes, the berries of which were for the most part rotten, or unsound, or unripe, so that scarcely two or three were quite good and even these soiled. This was the vision shown to him, and our Lord added these words, "This is the similitude of thy life; two or three actions are good, but if I examine them with severity I shall find, even in them, much to reprehend." Conclude, then, what are the works of the more imperfect when beheld by the eyes of God, if such be the works of the great saints. Woe to us if the Lord dealt with us in all rigour. "*If thou shalt observe iniquities, O Lord, Lord who shall endure*

⁴ 1 Cor. xv. 10.

it?" Our very good works themselves should make us afraid, to say nothing of our sins. "*I was afraid of all my works.*"⁵ Lastly, add to the faults of commission those of omission, and see how they mount up to heaven. "*Our iniquities have grown up to the heavens.*"⁶ For if the transgressions be many "He shall reprove thee for the multitude of thy sins," the omissions, says St. Thomas, may be called infinite, "and for thy iniquities without number."⁷ So that if thou be not a great sinner for the evil thou doest, thou art a very great one for what thou hast left undone. How great is thy ingratitude, how great thy abuse of grace, which if given to another might have produced so much fruit. Thou art as a broken vessel into which all that is poured is wasted. "*The heart of a fool is a broken vessel, all the wisdom which is poured in, it will not contain.*"⁸ The grace which is given thee in so many prayers, in so many Communion, in so many occasions of doing good, may be called the Blood of Christ, since it is purchased by that most precious Blood. And yet this so precious balm, poured into thy heart so many years, where is it? Where is the effect of that supernal wisdom communicated to thee in so many lights from heaven? where is the multiple of those talents? and yet the Lord will demand it of thee so exactly. "*To whom much is given of him much will be required.*"⁹ See, then, how the more thou hast, the poorer thou art. Thy riches are but a loan to thee, which, instead of causing vain exultation in the possessor for the moment who receives them, keeps him ever solicitous with the thought of the account he will have to give,

⁵ Job ix. 28.

⁶ 1 Esdras ix. 6

⁷ Job xii. 15.

⁸ Eccles. ii. 17.

⁹ St. Luke xii. 48.

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*"Cum augentur dona rationes etiam crescunt donorum."*¹⁰

Practices or acts towards God.

1. Place thyself in the presence of God as the poor Prodigal, and confess that thou art not worthy to be numbered among the servants of His house, for having squandered so rich a patrimony of grace.

2. Or look upon thyself as a poor leper covered with sores, and say to Him, "If Thou wilt Thou canst make me clean."

3. Think thyself unworthy of the providence of God over thee, unworthy of His inspirations, unworthy of all the other means of salvation which thou hast abused or omitted to use.

4. Offer to God all that glory which men in the blindness of their pride have taken from Him to themselves, protesting that to Him alone all is due as the Author of all good. "All our works, O Lord, Thou hast wrought in us,"¹¹ and therefore in the name of all men I make this restitution to Thee.

5. In arduous undertakings have confidence that thou, as the instrument the most unfit, wilt therefore be the more assisted by the Lord Who has need but of such as thou, and "Who calleth the things that are not as the things that are."¹²

Acts towards thyself.

1. When men speak well of thee, remember as the Blessed Catherine of Genoa used to say, they do not speak of *thee*. Thou, by thyself, without God, hast as much and no more in what is good as the devil himself.

2. When thou findest that thou art fallen into some

¹⁰ St. Gregory.

¹¹ Isaias xxvii. 12.

¹² Rom. iv. 17.

fault make use of that occasion to know thy own weakness, as when a thief is taken "in delicto."

3. If thou art obliged by obedience to mount to any degree of pre-eminence or government, descend in thy heart reflecting on thy own demerits.

4. Be not ready to excuse thyself though thou be innocent, for thou wilt very seldom do it except from a motive of pride.

5. When thou lookest upon the gifts of God to thee, look upon thy own misery together with them. Though a painting be ever so beautiful, it is a sorry bit of canvass upon which it is laid.

Acts towards thy neighbour.

1. When thou receivest some annoyance, wait not for another to humble himself to thee, but be the first to humble thyself for having given occasion to it.

2. Be willing to be subject to others, and seek to do another's will rather than thy own.

3. Do not look for thanks in doing good to others, but think thou hast only done thy duty to be servant of all.

4. Desire nothing beyond the common fare, but rather less than the others as being the most unworthy of all.

5. When thou sayest anything to thy own humiliation be well pleased that others believe it, lest thou humble thyself as the hypocrite does. "There is one who humbleth himself wickedly, but his interior is full of deceit."¹³

Prayer to Christ our Lord, the Pattern of Humility.

"O Eternal Word made flesh for love of us, I adore

¹³ Ecclus. xix. 23.

Thee in Thy great majesty, and I adore Thee no less in Thy humiliations. For in Thy glory and in Thy humbleness Thou art always God, and as Thou hast exalted our nature in making it Divine by union with Thee, so hast Thou exalted our infirmities by taking them upon Thee and impressing upon them a stamp of supreme nobility. Thou wast not content to be master of humility without being a pattern of it also, and Thou wast pleased first to exhibit it in all Thy life before Thou taughtest it by Thy Word, that so Thou mightest prevent all excuse for my pride and force me to surrender to the truth, what excuse can I have left me to pretend to exalt myself? I, who am a miserable worm and vile sinner, when Thy Divine Majesty so stupendously humbles itself? Indeed, I have none and I make submission to the truth, I confess before heaven and earth that in me there is no good thing. All is Thine, the gift of Thy hands, and all is solely for Thy sake and given me for Thy glory. But though I confess all this for certain, still, alas, I return to the misery of my foolish vanity, I take complacency in what I do as though it were my own, forgetting all my innumerable defects as though they were not my own. O, then, my most merciful Lord, my Truth, and my Light, illumine my eyes with my own clay, '*Lord make me that I may see.*' Give me so great a knowledge of my own imperfections that it may overwhelm my pride, and that I may no more lift up my head to think myself any more than a mere *nothing*. And since this is not enough, make me also consider and treat myself as such, and willingly be treated so by others for the love of Thee." Amen.

CONSIDERATION VII.

ON THE NOTHING THAT WE ARE IN COMPARISON
WITH THE SAINTS AND WITH GOD.

POINT I. *In comparison with the servants of God living at present in the world.*—Consider that supposing all the good either natural or supernatural which thou hast were thy own, yet it is so scant that it will not bear comparison with others. So that every way thou art still nothing, and there is no room for pride. Compare thyself with all the holy souls now living in the Church of God. Count the graces, the faith, the charity, the unwearied zeal, they have in serving God, their purity, their obedience, their holy hatred of themselves, and all their sentiments of piety. “*Number the stars if thou canst.*” It would be easier to count these in heaven than to count the virtues, the graces, the good works of so many servants of God, in retirement, in the cloister, in the world, of every state and condition. Set now beside these thy virtues and will they not seem like children’s clay-houses set beside the temple and golden house of Solomon? “*Thou shalt look to men and say I have sinned.*”¹ If thou attentively consider them in this manner thou wilt bow thy face to the earth with shame and say, “*I have sinned.*” Thy virtues will appear so mingled with defects that from the preponderance of these thou wilt rather call them vices than virtues. “Weighing himself by comparison with the Saints he will find himself a sinner,” says St. Gregory, expounding the passage above. However well a country girl be dressed, and however much she study polite

¹ Job xxiii. 27.

speech, if she comes to Court she makes all laugh, and, when put beside ladies and princesses, discovers plainly her rudeness and want of education. "*I have seen true monks and am not a monk.*" I see what it is to be a servant of God, and I do not deserve the name. If the earth which is of so great compass about is but a point in comparison with the heavens, what art thou compared with the whole heavens of the Church? Thou art a point, but a point blown up into a bubble, which every way considered is a *nothing*. Yet thou wouldest be some great thing.

POINT II. *In comparison with the Saints in heaven.*

—Consider that all the saints on earth do not love God with so perfect a love as the least of the Blessed loves Him. For as St. Thomas teaches,² "The love which proceeds from a clear sight of God incomparably surpasses in value the love which proceeds from the obscure knowledge of faith." So that if thou art nothing in comparison with all the saints of the Church on earth, what wilt thou be in comparison with all the saints of heaven? Thou must needs confess thyself indeed a sinner. "He shall look upon the saints and say I have sinned." Compare then thy charity with that blessed fire with which so mightily all the saints and angels are burning, thou wilt see that thine is no more than a spent cinder compared with all the furnaces of the world and the mountains with their volcanoes. And if raising thy eyes still higher, thou lift them up to the throne of the Most Holy Virgin Mother equalling alone in Beauty all the rest of heaven together, "*Decora sicut Jerusalem,*"³ where wilt thou appear? And, again, if thou proceedest to come into the

² 2a. 2æ. ix. 24, 7 ad 3m.

³ Cant. vi. 3.

presence of the Sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ, the Word Incarnate, holy with ineffable holiness by union with the Divinity, where wilt thou be found? "Thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting." In the balance of this comparison thou art less in weight than nothing. And if this sun of our universe makes motes seem something, this Sun of the world above makes the greatest mountains of sanctity seem as nothing. The Angel Guardian of St. Frances of Rome (as in her life) made his countenance serve as a bright looking-glass in which she might see her defects. So that from the time she received the grace to see that glorious face she increased immeasurably in the humble estimate of herself. What should we then see in ourselves if the face of Jesus Christ Himself served us as our mirror? We should see an abyss of impotence and imperfections so profound that no eye could penetrate its depths but the eye of God alone. "*Imperfectum meum viderunt oculi Tui.*"⁴ Thine but none other.

POINT III. *In comparison with God.*—Consider that thou art yet incomparably more vile and contemptible compared with God's infinite greatness and infinite glory. "All nations are before Him as though they were not, and they are accounted as nothing and as a vain thing before Him."⁵ Creatures both possible and actual are as though they were not, in comparison with that inaccessible Light and fathomless Ocean of all good. And this is that which so humbles the saints in heaven and saints in this world, the "Esse," or Being of God. So that on account of a glimpse of it which Isaias had, he broke into the

⁴ Psalm cxxxviii. 16.

⁵ Isaias xl. 17.

exclamation, "*Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I have seen the King, the Lord God of Hosts.*"⁶ Since the great God of armies has shown to me some little of His Majesty, I dare not speak, so vile do I seem in His presence. "For the saints the more they contemplate the deep things of God, the more they know that they are nothing."⁷ Hence the knowledge of oneself cannot be complete without the knowledge of God also. "*Noverim Te, noverim me; ut amem Te et contemnam me,*" said St. Austin wisely. Here is then what thou art with all the good thou hast. Thou art an atom surrounded on all sides by a boundless abyss of perfections which in thee are not, and in God are. And therefore by this comparison what art thou? Thou art nothing and God is all in all. "*Ipse est omnia.*"⁸ If He is all, then thou art none. If He alone *is*, then thou art that which *is not*. Down, down then with the city of confusion, accursed pride. "*Cecidit, cecidit Babylon magna.*"⁹ If man be absolutely nothing in what he is of himself, and is nothing in comparison in what he receives from God, of what can he boast? "*Thy glory is nothing.*" "His boast *is of nothing*. 'I am an abyss of vanity of ignorance and nothing. Thou art an abyss of Truth, Wisdom, and Goodness, and of all things, O my God and my All.' So thought the humble St. Francis, full as he was of the truth of the knowledge of himself, as for the most part men are full of darkness and ignorance."¹⁰

⁶ Isaias vi. 5.⁷ St. Greg. xviii. *Moral.* c. 33.⁸ Eccl. iv. versio Græc.⁹ Apoc. xviii. 10.¹⁰ Wadding's *Life of St. Francis*.

Practices or acts towards God.

1. Think nothing great but God and what belongs to God, despising thyself and all creatures. "*Quod eternum non est, nihil est.*"

2. Look upon the gifts of God in thee as not thine own. And therefore that while they adorn thee they remind thee of thy poverty. A poor woman who goes to church in a borrowed dress, because she has none of her own, is not vain as finely dressed, but ashamed as poor.

3. Submit to the will of God as a vile slave, and chide thyself when disposed to think His Providence hard with thee. "*Nonne Deo subjecta erit anima mea?*"

4. Thank God after any good work done, as for an alms given to thy beggary.

5. Be astonished that while the saints in heaven and on earth annihilate themselves in the presence of God for their dependence upon Him, acknowledging their nothingness, thy blindness finds wherewith to be proud. "*O nothingness unknown!*" cried Blessed Angela of Foligno, "*O nothingness, that art unknown!*"

Acts towards thyself.

1. Be a lover of silence and prefer rather to hear than to speak.

2. If thou art praised, conceive shame in thy heart for the different judgment the Lord Who is thy Creator passes on thee, which shall be one day made manifest to all, and then shall that saying be found true, "All they who glorified her, have despised her, for they have seen her shame."¹¹

¹¹ Lam. i. 8.

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3. Beware of making much of what thou sufferest, in order to draw on thyself compassion and to be made much of by the charity of others.

4. Force thyself to have displeasure at the honour thou receivest, considering the weakness of thy virtue to sustain the least assault of vanity.

5. Be amazed at the violence of thy passions, and that although fiery mountains are sometimes quiet, thy concupiscences are never at rest.

Acts towards thy neighbour.

1. When another blames thee be convinced that he has reason, for it would be little good to be silent with thy tongue and to murmur in thy heart.

2. Speak well of all. The truly humble has no bad opinion of any one but himself.

3. At every suggestion of harsh judgment of others be indignant with thyself, as seeing the motes in others and beholding not the beam in thy own eye.

4. When thou seest any one manifestly sin, confess that thou wouldest do worse wert thou in his place. Many a vine is only upright for the elm. If this be taken away it creeps on the ground like the rest.

5. When thou hearest any one blamed, have a care not to take inward complacency as though thou wert free from that fault, for pride is ever ready enough to exalt itself on the fall of others.

Prayer to the Most Holy Virgin to obtain for us Humility.

“Most pure Virgin, Mother of Holy Love, who owest all thy greatness to thy humility, I find no better plea to put before thee, than to beseech thee to conquer my pride. This is thy enemy and the

enemy of thy Son our Lord, Who for its destruction was content to stoop so low as to unite His Divinity to our nothingness, and His Humanity to a suffering death upon the Cross. Turn then upon me a miserable sinner those most merciful eyes of thine. I ask no more than that thou deign to cast but one look upon me, for if thou canst have the heart to see me in such destitution and yet to leave me in such abandonment, I am content to remain in it. But that great pity of thine will not permit thee, nor thy office of our Advocate and Mother which thy dying Son imposed upon thee the last time He spoke to thee in this world. I beseech thee by all these titles, and by that complacency which the Most Holy Trinity takes in thy immaculate soul, that thou wouldest be pleased to extinguish in me all vain conceit of myself and all affection to the honour of this world. Let my glory be to give to Jesus all the glory, and to confess for ever that I am a sinner, and that all the goods I possess by His grace are nothingness in the presence of His Divine Majesty. This truth which thou hast taught me by thy example, do thou teach me to practise, that so I may come to magnify with thee the Lord in heaven, and give Him thanks for ever, that He has mercifully looked in pity upon so miserable a soul as mine." Amen.

TWELVE CONSIDERATIONS ON DEATH.

PREFACE.

FATHER ALOYSIUS LA NUZA, the Apostle of Sicily, called for his innocence and devotion, the Angel of the Blessed Sacrament, was born in the year 1591, the same year in which St. Aloysius Gonzaga died, whom he resembled in virginal purity, love for the Blessed Virgin, and penitential life. He preached throughout Sicily and the adjacent parts, and the concourse of people to hear him in the open air sometimes amounted to twenty-five thousand. He wrought many miracles, and died at Palermo in 1654, with the same words in his mouth which were on the lips of St. Aloysius at his death—"Lætantes ibimus." His soul was seen to enter heaven accompanied by St. Ignatius, St. Francis Xavier, and others of the Society, and an innumerable multitude of souls which by his means had been saved.

- I. The hour of death.
- II. On what way and in what manner thou wilt die.
- III. How at the hour of death the deceits of the world are better known.
- IV. On the fear of the account thou hast to give, and the sins of thy past life.
- V. Of the horrible sight of the devil, and the three assaults he will make at death.
- VI. On the fear of the Judge, and the particular judgment which will be made at the moment of death.
- VII. On the accusers and witnesses at the hour of death.
- VIII. On the fear of the sentence to be pronounced on thee at death.
- IX. On the state of the soul when it parts from the body, and where it goes to dwell.
- X. On the journey which the body makes when carried to the grave.
- XI. On the wretchedness and filthiness of the body in the grave.
- XII. Reflection of the preceding considerations, and the fruit of them.

CONSIDERATION I.

PRELUDE.—Imagine that you are on your death-bed, about to expire.

POINT I.—Ponder, that death will come at the hour you least expect. Christ has said it: “*Quâ horâ non putatis Filius hominis veniet.*”¹ Death comes unlooked for, just as the fish strikes on the hook and the bird is in the net when they least fear it. “*Nescit homo finem suum, sed sicut pisces capiuntur hamo, et aves laqueo comprehenduntur, sic capiuntur homines in tempore malo, cum eis exemplò supervenerit.*”² It comes like the thief, whose hour is when all in the house are asleep. “*Si sciret paterfamilias quâ horâ fur veniret, vigilaret utique: et vos estote parati.*”³ Be upon your watch, O my dear brother! See that death find thee not in sin, in an evil time, in the height of thy offences. Think that thou hast soon to die, but thou knowest not when, whether this year or the next, or in a month. Make a good confession and settle thy accounts with God. Keep a regular life, somewhat retired, confessing every eight days, and observing the commandments.

POINT II.—Consider, O my brother, that the day will come when thou wilt not see the night. The night will come when thou wilt not see the morning. Alas! poor man, how wilt thou be when thou art at

¹ St. Luke xii. 40.

² Eccles. ix. 12.

³ St. Luke xii. 39.

thy last passage? It will perhaps be on the day, the night, the hour, on which in some past time thou didst sin against God. Oh, if this be so, how will God's justice have kept pace with thee in the punishment and the hour of death? It is come, and what wilt thou now do? O hour which was not looked for, the last of the days of thy life! O moment which ushers in eternity! Thy pastimes, thy frolics, thy friendships, thy conversations, thy music and thy songs and thy revels are ended—but the pains that await thee, the fire and eternal torments, shall never end. All is over, and eternity begins. O moment of death! —*Momentum unde pendet aeternitas*. What thinkest thou now, my soul? Thou wilt find thyself at that narrow pass, and then thou wilt burst into a cold sweat at the thought of the sins of thy evil life. Why, then, dost thou not make thy resolves now? If the morsels which now taste to thee so sweet shall then be so exceedingly bitter, why dost thou not leave now the honey which shall be such gall and wormwood at the hour of death?

POINT III.—Consider that death comes once for all. "*Statutum est hominibus semel mori.*" "*Semel*," says St. Paul. Death is not like wine, to taste and try. There is no previous assay, but it is once only, a thing to be done; and at thy risk, be it well or ill done. It is a leap thou hast once for all to take; if thou leap not over the channel of a stream thou fallest in, and so if thou leap not over the gulf of hell thou fallest in for ever. There may be rehearsals of a play to see how it will be when acted, and these may be repeated; a horse may be tried, which has to run upon the course; and he who has to do feats of arms may practise his dexterity—but death alone admits of

no trial beforehand. If thou makest a mistake here, woe to thee, thou art undone for eternity. "*O momentum unde pendet æternitas !*"

CONSIDERATION II.

ON WHAT WAY AND IN WHAT MANNER THOU
WILT DIE.

PRELUDE.—Imagine that thou art in danger and at the point of death.

POINT I.—Ponder, that thou knowest not the manner in which thou wilt die. Tremendous thought ! Thou knowest not whether thou shalt die in thy bed, or by violence in the street, or by lightning stroke, or by drowning at sea, or by sudden apoplexy. "*Nescit homo finem suum,*" are the words of Solomon. Nor dost thou know in what state death will find thee ; in the grace of God, or in sin. Death will perhaps find thee, as justice finds the thief, theft in hand, in a state of sin, and so in one moment thou wilt lose both body and soul. "*In peccato vestro moriemini.*"¹ The King Baltassar was struck by the hand of God in a drunken revel ; Absalom, David's son, in impenitence. It was said to the rich fool, "*Stulte hâc nocte repentent animam tuam.*"² *Repentent*, that is, the devils shall take it for their own. Woe to thee, if death find thee in a state of sin. "*Væ qui prædaris, nonne et ipse prædaberis ?*"³ When least thou thinkest, thou shalt be the spoil of death.

POINT II.—Think that while perhaps thou art sinning, God is writing the sentence of death against

¹ St. John viii. 21.

² St. Luke xii. 20.

³ Isaias xxxiii. 1.

thee. Thus it is with the wicked. Death arrests them before they have completed half their days. "*Viri sanguinum, et dolosi non dimidiabunt dies suos.*"⁴ God has fixed for each one the number of his sins, and when he arrives at it, then without fail He takes from him the aid of efficacious grace, and often cuts short his life. "*Implete mensuram patrum vestrorum,*" said our Lord to the Pharisees.⁵ Woe to thee, poor sinner. How knowest thou whether or not at thy first sin God will curse thee as He did the fig-tree in the Gospel, and suddenly wither up thy life before thy natural term, in the prime of thy days?

POINT III.—The remedy of all is to be upon the watch, and to keep in the grace of God, praying Him continually to preserve thee from an unprovided death. "*A subitanâ et improvisâ morte, libera nos Domine.*" Thou hast to take note of three things. First, how much grief and pain at the point of death the sins of thy ill-spent life will give thee. Oh, how clearly wilt thou see then what thou dost not observe now, nor take into account. Now thou committest sin with thy eyes shut, then thou wilt open them to thy cost. Secondly, ponder and take note of what thou wouldst do in that last moment and passage of thy life, if God gave thee space for repentance. Thirdly, resolve to do now what then thou wouldst have done, which thou shalt not then have it in thy power to do.

⁴ Psalm liv. 24.

⁵ St. Matt. xxiii. 32.

CONSIDERATION III.

HOW AT THE HOUR OF DEATH THE DECEITS OF THE WORLD ARE FAR BETTER KNOWN.

PRELUDE.—Imagine to thyself a man who, plunged in the midst of the pleasures, business, and honours of the world, lies upon his bed of death about to expire.

POINT I.—Think what is the anguish of a worldling when he hears the tidings of death. “Set thy house in order, for thou shalt die,” said the Prophet to King Ezechias.¹ Then the sick King upon his bed turned his face to the wall and began to weep. “*In dimidio dierum meorum vadam ad portas inferi.*” Alas! that I die young, and leave my kingdom and riches and honours. Yes, then too late, the cheats of this world are known. A man is immersed in the business of amassing money, of gaining office, or looking forward to spending in pastimes many a long and pleasant day; but while he is weaving his web of life with many designs upon it, death comes and cuts short life and web and the projects he had formed, “*dum adhuc ordiner succidit me.*” Oh, how the world mocks us with its pretended happiness and delusive hopes! At the end we shall open our eyes and see how life was very short, its pastimes fuel for hell’s fires, the goods of this world false and deluding, its delights deadly poison, its sweets the bitterness of gall, its contentments hollow, its joys feigned, its promises lies, its prosperity unreal, its glory transitory, its happiness for a moment. Then thou wilt cry, “O world, dost thou leave me? My pleasures and my friends, do you all

¹ Isaias xxxviii. 1.

remain here while I go yonder to another life? And what do I carry with me but my sins and eternal wretchedness? O blind and fool that I have been!"

POINT II.—Consider that thou wilt carry nothing hence but thy deeds, good or bad. If thou hast done evil, this thou wilt take with thee; the rest thou wilt leave, house, goods, children, friends, money, gold or silver. If thou hast been wicked, this thy wickedness is thy money, thy goods which thou hast got to purchase a dwelling in hell. With thy money thou hast bought it. Alas! poor wretch, when at its close thou shalt turn thy eyes upon thy life and say, "Soul, where are now thy sweet morsels of this life? I have now nought of them all, but the grave for my body and hell for my soul." As Job said of sinners, "*Ducunt in bonis dies suos et in puncto ad inferna descendunt.*"²

POINT III.—Think that then thy soul will be in that condition in which one is who lies mid-ocean in a mighty storm, and sees nothing but sea and sky, and is about to sink into the bottomless depth of the billows. So shalt thou then find thyself tossed with tempests, and thou shalt see nothing but heaven or hell and an endless eternity. O eternity without end! O bottomless pit of hell into which thou art about to be plunged, and cast into the pool of everlasting fire! It is said that from the surface of the earth to hell there are three thousand miles, and if, God help thee, thou make a slip and once fall thither, thou fallest headlong without hope of recovery, and for an endless eternity.

² Job xxi. 13.

CONSIDERATION IV.

ON THE FEAR OF THE ACCOUNT THOU HAST TO
GIVE, AND THE SINS OF THY PAST LIFE.

PRELUDE.—Imagine that thou art come to the moment of breathing thy last.

POINT I.—Think how thy soul will be all full of fear at the strict account it has to give to God. Then at that last passage there will rise upon thy memory one by one all thy iniquities, the scandals given by thy words and thy every most wicked thought. Ah, poor wretch, how will it be with thee when thou rememberest thy sins, done in such a place, in such a street, in such a house, in the city, in the field, on such a day and such an hour, and with such and such persons. Ah, poor unhappy soul, what confusion wilt thou have ! *Cogitationes meae dissipatae sunt, torquentes cor meum.*"¹ Ah me ! what torment to my heart will these thoughts give me then ! "*Circumdederunt me dolores mortis, pericula inferni invenerunt me.*"²

POINT II.—Consider how then the soul is about to go forth from the body and dare not, because it fears the face of the angry Judge. At that hour the saints tremble, and thou, who ceasest not even now to offend God, what dost thou look for at the end of thy life ? What canst thou expect ? How is it that thou tremblest not ? At that thy last passage all thy sins will come upon thee as armed men, to deal upon thee the justice of God. Thy sins will come all to thy mind which thou hast committed with thy eyes, with thy tongue, with thy thoughts. Oh how fervently wilt thou say, Would that God might give me life and

¹ Job xvii. 11.

² Psalm cxiv. 3.

time for repentance!—but this thought will then be too late.

POINT III.—Think how at that last passage thou wilt see that this life has been a breath of wind that passes, a flash of lightning, a dream. Where are now the forty, the fifty, the sixty years? “Where,” you will say, “are my days; in *what* have I spent them? O fool, fool, that I have been, how is it I did not think of this hour? How was it that I did not see that all would come to an end, that my pleasures and pastimes would come to this?—and now they are over and gone.” Then wilt thou see that nothing of this world can help thee, neither friends nor riches nor honours nor greatness. God alone, and thy good works, these can aid thee. Then thou wilt see that a dreadful eternity that awaits thee. Life ends, eternity begins. The pleasure is past and gone, but the pain will not pass nor the fire ever be quenched.

CONSIDERATION V.

OF THE HORRIBLE SIGHT OF THE DEVIL AND THE
THREE ASSAULTS HE WILL MAKE AT DEATH.

PRELUDE.—Imagine that thou art gradually losing thy senses and art in thy last agony.

POINT I.—Consider the fear that the sight of the devil will give thee, so hideous and so terrible. He will come to thy bedside, and not alone, but accompanied with as many devils as thou hast had habits of sin. They will come in the shape of beasts, as dogs, bears, wolves, lions, dragons, and will use all their power to drag thee down. First, the demon will

assault thee with temptations against the faith. He will make all the mysteries of the holy faith appear to thee like dreams and shadows. Thou shalt have this temptation in punishment for having lived like a beast, plunged in unlawful pleasures, making thyself like a Moor or worse in lusts, as though there were neither God nor hell. As a beast thou hast lived, as a beast thou shalt die, as a Moor, as a heathen, and a pagan.

POINT II.—The second temptation will be against hope. The devil will put all thy sins before thee and the rigour of the justice of God, so as to make thee fearful and despairing. Oh, how he will then say to thee, “There is no mercy for thee, no hope of pardon. If this God of vengeance did not spare me, though I was an angel in heaven, but for one sin cast me down to hell, what canst thou expect who hast done so many? If God the Father chastises His Son for the sins of others by death upon the Cross, how can He pardon thee, who hast rebelled against Him so often and crucified His Son anew? ‘If these things be done in the green wood, what shall be done in the dry?’¹ Thou hast served the world and the flesh, and dost thou think that Paradise is for thee? Thou hast ever walked in the ways of hell, and now thou art at its gates. Dost *thou* think to enter into heaven? Thou art already damned.”

POINT III.—The third temptation with which the devil assaults is to urge to mortal sin, which he will induce thee to commit at the last, and it will be of that kind to which by habit thou art used. Thus Christ our Lord declared—“*In your sin you will die.*” Art thou in the habit of sinning by thy tongue? The

¹ St. Luke xxiii. 31.

devil will make thee die sinning by the tongue. Hast thou been in the habit of consenting to evil thoughts? He will make thee die consenting to wicked thoughts. Thy death will be the echo of thy life. As life so death. Thy bad habit is the chain or cord with which the devil will bind thee prisoner at thy death, to drag thee along with him to be his companion in hell.

CONSIDERATION VI.

ON THE FEAR OF THE JUDGE AND THE PARTICULAR JUDGMENT WHICH WILL BE MADE AT THE MOMENT OF DEATH.

PRELUDE.—Imagine that thou art summoned before the tribunal of the heavenly Judge, and hearest said, *“Give account of thy life.”*

POINT I.—Consider what will be thy fear when thou thinkest, “Soon I shall have to appear before God to give account of my whole life, of all my thoughts, of all my words, and all my deeds.” Oh, what a rigorous account will be taken of thee. This David feared when he said, “Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord, for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified.”¹ Account will be demanded even of every idle word, as the Evangelist declares, “Of every idle word that men shall speak they shall give account in the Day of Judgment.”² What then shall be the account of wicked words, and of deeds still worse? Oh, how will God, the Just Judge, weigh thee in the balance? He will say to thee, “Give Me an account of My Commandments and how thou hast kept them, how many times thou hast broken them.

¹ Psalm lii. 2.

² St. Matt. .

Thou didst live as though thou wast not a Christian, as if there were neither God nor death nor hell nor last judgment. Thou hast not loved Me. Thy whole heart thou hast given to thy gain, thy money, and thy companions. Thou hast given Me in exchange for a sin." Oh, what answer wilt thou make to God?

POINT II.—"Give Me account," He will say, "of the good thou hast left undone. So much time—how and in what didst thou spend it? How little in My service, how much in conversations, in idle talk, laughter, and play? How many opportunities have I given thee, how many good aids and means of grace? How many preachers and warnings have I given thee, how many inspirations and touches of thy heart? And thou hast been ever deaf and hard and obdurate, as Pharaoh—'*The heart of Pharaoh was hardened;*' as the Jewish people—'*Stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you do always resist the Holy Ghost.*'³ How many times hast thou refused to hear My call? Now I turn a deaf ear to thy prayers. '*The hard heart shall be in evil case at the last.*'"⁴

POINT III.—"Give Me account of so many benefits I have done to thee in body and soul. From how many dangers and misfortunes have I delivered thee, and thou hast been always ungrateful, and hast made more account of a comrade than Me! Thou hast done more for an accomplice in sin than for Me, thy God." God says, "It is I that give thee bread to sustain thee. I for thee did take flesh and redeem thee by My death upon the Cross between two thieves; for thee I have bequeathed the Most Holy Sacrament of My Body and Blood; for thee I have

³ Acts vii. 51.

⁴ Eccclus. iii. 27.

prepared heaven and promised its glory ; and thou, ungrateful that thou art, hast cared neither for My Blood nor for heaven. Thou hast served the world and thy flesh." Make answer to God if thou canst.

CONSIDERATION VII.

ON THE ACCUSERS AND WITNESSES AT THE HOUR
OF DEATH.

PRELUDE.—*Imagine* the Judgment Seat on which Jesus Christ sits, and thyself in the midst of thy accusers, and the witnesses against thee.

POINT I.—Think what will be thy fear at seeing thyself in the midst of so many accusers and witnesses against thee. Thy first accuser will be thy wicked life. Thy conscience will be the trumpet, to proclaim and publish thy wickedness. It is the dog that ever barks, the thorn that ever pricks, the worm that ever gnaws the heart, and the executioner that tortures thee and the hammer that ever beats upon the heart. "*My sin is ever against me.*"

POINT II.—Thy accusers will be all created things. The sun which saw thee sin by day, the moon which saw thee sin against God by night. The very stones will cry out against thee. That house, that garden, those instruments thou madest use of to offend Thy God, shall be witnesses against thee.

POINT III.—The angels will accuse thee, and especially thy Guardian Angel. Oh, how many times thy good angel gave thee warning and touched thy heart, and thou madest it of little account ! Nay, in the presence of thy angel thou didst sin, and wast deaf to him and hardened thy heart.

Point IV.—The devils will accuse thee. Oh, how wilt thou see them gather at thy bedside! How will they bring their allegations against thee? What will thou do when the demons shall say, “We are the witnesses. Read the list of thy sins. In this book they are written, and thou canst not deny them—at such an hour thou didst this, such a day this other sin, in such a place, with such a one.” And what answer wilt thou make? They, as having won the day, will shout at thee, “*Euge, Euge*” (well, well). And thou, what wilt thou say?

CONSIDERATION VIII.

ON THE FEAR OF THE SENTENCE TO BE PRONOUNCED
ON THEE AT DEATH.

PRELUDE.—Picture to thyself that having been accused and found guilty, the Judge is about to pass sentence.

POINT I.—If a king’s son were in captivity and there came a ransom for him, but his master said, “I will not free him for gold, but let lots be cast, and put in the casting-box two dies, one black and one white; if the black be thrown, fling this king’s son into a furnace of fire; if the white, let him go free to his home and country.” How would the heart of that king’s son beat in his breast when the lot was about to be cast, to think that within a brief space he would either be freed or burned alive. So wilt thou be at that moment. If thy soul be found white thou shalt go free to Paradise as a son of the King of heaven, if thy soul be black, thou shalt be cast into the fiery furnace of hell. . Alas, poor soul! what wilt

thou do? how wilt thou fare when thou shalt see that heaven or hell, one or the other, shall be thy lot?

POINT II.—Think what will be thy fear when, accused and found guilty, thou shalt stand a convicted felon, chapfallen and speechless, awaiting the final sentence to be passed upon thee. Alas, poor soul! then thou wilt be as the wretch who, with the cap drawn over his eyes, awaits the hangman to draw the bolt. Then hell will open beneath, and the demon at thy side will put the rope about thy neck.

POINT III.—Ponder, that thou oughtest to make a resolve to do as one that has to appear before the Eternal Judge and to await from Him the final sentence. A religious man was taken to the judgment, and on his return to consciousness said not a word, and however much importuned to say something replied nothing to the monks, except to ask them to inclose him with brick and mortar in a cell, and feed him with bread and water. This being done, he remained in it twelve years, weeping day and night, and thinking of what had passed in the tremendous judgment. At the expiration of that time the monks broke open the wall of the cell, and besought the good religious to say before he died what had passed in it. Then he answered, "Oh, if men knew how terrible that last passage is, and how rigorously God judges and chastises, most certainly there would be no man that would offend Him." And this said, he died. Now what will become of *thee* if thou makest not thy peace with God, and dost not endeavour to settle thy accounts now by a good confession and repentance?

CONSIDERATION IX.

ON THE STATE OF THE SOUL WHEN IT PARTS FROM
THE BODY, AND WHERE IT GOES TO DWELL.

PRELUDE.—Imagine that thou art now dead.

POINT I.—Consider that at the going forth of the soul from the body of the sinner the demon stands watching, like the cat for the mouse, to come out of its hole, and when it comes pounces upon it. So while the sinner is dying the demon is waiting for him, and when the soul parts he pounces upon it. Oh, how strong is the paw of that infernal lion! who can escape his claws? In a moment he hangs a weight round the neck, which is sin, and down it sinks and carries it to hell. How wilt thou fare when thou findest thyself in the devil's grip?

POINT II.—Think how many souls the devil at this moment, at this hour, is seizing upon; think of the multitudes who die in sin. Of so many who are dying, some in bed, some by violence, some at sea, some in one manner, some in another, of whom the greater part fall into hell. A soul carried to the judgment seat of God saw sixty thousand souls all in one instant condemned to eternal flames, and only three to Purgatory. Alas, poor sinners! how the demons carry them off in bundles, and in bundles take them to hell. The devil hangs about them a weight like a great millstone and lets them fall to the bottom of the sea of eternal fire, verifying the words of St. Matthew xviii. 6, "that a millstone be hung about his neck and that he be cast into the depths of the sea."

POINT III.—Consider the first entrance that the

soul makes into hell. What peals of mocking laughter the devils make! At the entrance thou wilt read written over the gate "*whoso enters here leaves hope behind.*" And the hope of mercy and pardon being gone there is no more remedy. Eternally thou shalt burn in fires in the company of devils. Oh thought to make all men tremble; have they sense? What think they of? Where is judgment fled? Oh, how the demon makes game of us! Ah, poor me! how will it fare with me if at the exit of my soul the devil seize it and plunge it into that abyss of woe?

CONSIDERATION X.

ON THE JOURNEY WHICH THE BODY MAKES WHEN
CARRIED TO THE GRAVE.

PRELUDE.—Imagine that thou goest forth from thy house a dead corpse, and art carried upon a bier to the grave.

POINT I.—Soon as thou art dead the people of the house cry and lament, thy relatives, wife and children, brothers and sisters. The bell tolls, and gives signal to the people of a passing funeral. "Who is dead?" they ask. "Such a one," is the reply. "Well, we are soon gone; the other day we were together, we spoke with one another; poor fellow, he died soon; he was young. What property has he left?" Meanwhile thou goest along the street a corpse borne by others. All stop to gaze. Some speak of thee in one way, some in another.

POINT II.—Consider that when thou art come to the churchyard they open the vault where the bones

of the dead await thee. There shall thy body dwell till the Judgment Day. Now take thy repose there, because thou hast laboured much for this world to amass wealth for thy house. Poor body! there it will lie buried forsaken by all. Thy relatives wait for the opening of the will to see if thou leave them anything, and then perhaps they rejoice over thy toil and labour, and over thy money, for which perhaps thy soul will be in hell. Now take thy rest till the trumpet sound and thou hear "Arise ye dead and come to judgment." The body will await the soul. Yes, thy friend the soul will come to find thee, and if it come from hell, think of what good it can do for thee. Alas, poor corpse!

POINT III.—Think that when dead, as thou wilt be, thy friends and thy relatives will forget thee. They will scarcely fulfil the pious works and the legacies thou leavest for the good of thy soul. Every one looks to his own business. He who can take takes his portion. And thou, silly fool that thou art, thinkest that thine will take care of thy soul. "*The living, the living shall confess to Thee as I this day.*"¹

CONSIDERATION XI.

ON THE WRETCHEDNESS AND FILTHINESS OF THE
BODY IN THE GRAVE.

PRELUDE.—Picture to thyself thy body in the grave covered in with earth.

POINT I.—Soon the body begins to swell and then bursts, and the corruption issues forth. Oh, body, once fair and delicate, where is now the well-combed

¹ Isaias xxxviii. 19.

hair, the perfumes and the ornaments? How fares it with it now? "*He stinks, for he is four days dead.*" In a day or two the worms will swarm to eat the flesh thou hast pampered. "*To rottenness I said thou art my father, my mother and my sisters to the worms.*"¹ To this they come at last, nobles, princes, kings, gallant youths and ladies. Alas, poor creatures that we are! St. Francis Borgia, grandee of Spain, duke, and viceroy, was thus converted. He was taking charge of the body of the Empress on its way to burial. On the opening of the coffin he saw her so foul and horrible that he could not recognise her. "Is this," said he, "is this that great queen? O world and its emptiness! I will henceforth serve a Master that can never die. I will serve my God." He became a religious of great penitence, and by the consideration of death became a saint.

POINT II.—Consider that if the body shall give forth so foul a stench, how will the soul stink in mortal sin. We read that an angel and a hermit going in company passed by the body of a dead and stinking horse. The hermit said, "Let us pass by quickly," and held his nose. The angel took no notice of the smell. Presently they came upon a young man, handsome, gallant, and perfumed. Then the angel, with a look of horror, said, "Let us pass quickly," and holding his nose said, "This wanton and proud young man stinks worse than any carrion."

POINT III.—Think that the world's empty show ends in stench and worms, and that the dead say to thee thus :

*"What thou art now we once have been,
What we are now thou shalt be seen,
When laid like us within the grave;
Go, think on how thy soul to save."*

¹ Job xvii. 4.

CONSIDERATION XII.

REFLECTION OF THE PRECEDING CONSIDERATIONS, AND
THE FRUIT OF THEM.

IMAGINE that thou seest *death* before thee and *sin* behind thee. Angels on thy *right* hand and devils on thy left; *beneath* thee the yawning grave and *above* thee the sword of God's justice.

POINT I.—“I know that Thou wilt deliver me to death.”¹ I shall come to the end of my days, and with this all will end to me, nor can I escape it. “Thou hast set its bounds, which cannot be passed.”² The day will come and I shall not see the evening, the night will come of which I shall not see the morning. I am condemned to die, and I stand blindfolded waiting the executioner. “Remember, O man, that dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return.” And this shall quickly be. “My days have been swifter than a runner.”³ My body will be rottenness, the worms will feed on my flesh, and I shall be by all forgotten. Thou thoughtest not upon thy soul when living, and others will not think of thee when dead. Why then hast thou so much affection for thy body that shall decay, and none for thy soul? Why givest thou so much thought to passing things and none to thy soul and to eternity.

POINT II.—“Watch, for ye know not when the Lord cometh, whether at the first watch or at midnight, or at cock-crow, or at dawn.”⁴ Who knows when the last year of thy life will be? Who knows

¹ Job xxx. 23.

² Job xiv. 15.

³ Job ix. 25.

⁴ St. Mark xiii. 35.

whether this is the last month? the last week? whether this is thy last day on which depends eternity? Who knows what kind of death will be thine? And in particular whether thou wilt die a sudden death. All deaths are terrible; "of terrible things death is most terrible," but a sudden death is a thing most of all to make one afraid. Perhaps thou wilt be summoned at a time when thou art most unprepared. Add to this that thou hast deserved by thy sins that God should shorten thy life, and that it pass speedily. "Their days have gone in vanity, and their years in haste."⁵ Perchance thou wilt not come to the half of thy days. "Deceitful men shall not live out half their days."⁶ God grant that He deny not grace efficacious to salvation, and that it come not to pass that "in your sin you shall die." Why not think, then, whilst thou hast time to repent? Why not change thy life whilst thou hast time?

POINT III.—"*At the hour ye think not the Son of Man shall come!*"⁷ Christ will come then to judge thee; thou shalt stand before that dread tribunal, and have for thy accusers, first thine own evil conscience; secondly, all the demons who enticed thee to sin; that is the time at which the firmest pillars, the very saints have shaken with fear. St. Mechtilde, so innocent in life and manners, was afraid; St. Eleazar trembled at death; St. Hilarion, after seventy years of penitence, feared. The servant of God, a Franciscan, cried, "Oh, that I had not been born!" The devils durst accuse St. Antony. What then will become of thee? And thou thinkest not of it! hast thou lost thy reason? So many terrible things await thee, and

⁵ Psalm lxxvii.⁶ Psalm liv. 24.⁷ St. Luke xii. 40.

thou makest no preparation for them! Change thy manner of behaviour, and live henceforth so that it may not come true of thee: "Most evil is the death of sinners."⁸

⁸ Psalm xxxiii. 21.

FOUR CONSIDERATIONS ON ETERNITY.

PREFACE.

THESE four Considerations on Eternity, composed by Father John Baptist Manni, of the Society of Jesus, were first printed at Venice at the request of the Princess Mary Gonzaga of Mantua, to be distributed for the good of souls. They were afterwards reprinted at Rome, in 1673. They contain solid matter of meditation on the great truth expressed in the words of Ecclesiasticus, "*Man shall go into the house of his eternity.*"¹

¹ Eccles. xii. 5.

- I. Eternity of the soul.**
- II. Eternity of the body.**
- III. Eternity of heaven.**
- IV. Eternity of hell.**

I.

ETERNITY OF THE SOUL.

"What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, but suffer the loss of his own soul."—St. Matt. xvi.

THE first truth to be drawn from the consideration of Eternity is an intimate perception *of the value of the soul*, accompanied with a firm purpose to prefer the interests of the soul to the interests of the body: for our soul is *but one—one alone*; one *everlasting*; and once lost can never be gained again, once saved can never more be lost.

Let him, then, who shall look upon these few lines retire into the closet of his heart, and there, as one who in quiet meditation has in thought arrived at the threshold of the eternal gates, and sees them both flung open by the hand of God—one leading to heaven, the other opening to the yawning pit of hell—let him gaze upon that interminable abyss of endless ages, and fixing his eyes upon it, repeat to himself again and again these three words, and these only, "*Never!*"—"Eternity!"—for "*Ever!*"

Then turning to his soul, let him arouse it from the slumber of sin, saying, "O my soul, I pray thee to remember that thou art eternal, and hast to live for eternity—whether it be for blessedness or for misery, thou livest for eternity; thy warfare is for eternity, thou sufferest for eternity, for thy suffering in this life,

in which thou canst not but be in warfare, and suffer, is all in order that thou mayest live either eternally happy or eternally miserable. Death is the portal of eternity, and when thou art come to death, if thou enter not by the gate of heaven but by that of hell, oh, most unfortunate, then thou mayest say with the Eighth Harry of England, "*All is lost!*" for if the soul lose the soul, there remains no more to lose or gain.

Having, then, set foot upon the threshold of eternity, enter in step by step, and ponder again and again, that although eternity be infinite because there are in it infinite ages, infinite years, infinite months, infinite days, infinite hours, and infinite minutes; and minutes, hours, days, months, years, ages infinite upon infinite, nevertheless the consideration of it, *infinite though it be*, is all between two terms, themselves interminable, "*For ever*" and "*never*," and "*Never*" and "*for ever*." O my God and merciful Saviour! what an ocean is this without soundings and without shore, interminable and unlimited! Ah, my heart knocks, and every pulse thrills; my blood runs cold and the thoughts of my head trouble me, when I enter into this tremendous "*Never*" and "*For ever*;" a "*for ever*" which shall be without end, a "*never*" which shall be for evermore; a "*for ever*" which should never be banished from our thoughts, "*a never*" which should be ever fixed in our mind; an "*ever more*" penetrating, like a two-edged sword, the hearts of sinners; a "*never more*" piercing, as a thorn, the spirits of the just; an "*ever more*" dreadful to every rebellious child of Adam; a "*never more*" which has made the firmest pillars of the Church tremble; an "*ever*" which has peopled the deserts,

a "*never*" which has filled the monasteries ; an "*ever*" which has preserved the purity of virgins, a "*never*" which has emptied of their life blood the veins of martyrs ; an "*ever*" and a "*never*" which have given birth to sanctity and preserved innocence through life—*Oh never !—ever !—oh ever !—never !* Most surely he will never sin who thinks upon the "*ever*" to come ; and he will ever lead a holy life who thinks upon the eternal "*Never !*"—" *For ever !*"—" *Never !*"—" *Eternity !*"

Now, dear brother or sister, thou findest thyself in the midst of eternity, although middle or end it hath not, and thy mind in wonder and amazement asks of thee what is this eternity? And what is the measure of its duration? Eternity is a continuance ever present, a perpetual "*now*," which never passes ; a circle which never ceases ; a circle whose circumference is "*never*," and whose centre "*ever*," for it endures for ever, and has no limit or bounds of time. It is an immutable state, an everlasting fixedness, a sphere immeasurable, a wheel ever in gyration and never stopping, an ever-flowing fountain, whose waters run and return through countless channels, and never cease running and returning ; a spring from which issues an eternal river of sweetest streams of benediction or bitterest waters of malediction ; a serpent devouring its tail, which where it ends there it begins, and never ends beginning nor begins to end, without middle and without end.

Thou wouldst know what it is, and now thou knowest, though thou canst not know, for these imaginary figures, though they are expressive, yet they tell thee nothing ; an ant is not comparable with an elephant, but if it were, there is no comparison

between the finite and the infinite ; and what is more infinite than eternity, if it is not indeed *infinity* itself, or at least essentially infinite? After a thousand years, and after a hundred thousand, after a thousand million years, and a hundred million million of ages, neither the end, nor the middle, nor the beginning of eternity will have come, but as long as earth be earth, and heaven be heaven, as long as God—*dreadful and tremendous* thought, but *most true*—as long as God shall be God, so long shall the Blessed be blest and the Lost be lost ; and since God shall be God for ever, and never cease to be God, the Blessed shall therefore be ever blest, and the Lost be ever lost. The Lost shall never cease to be lost, nor the Blessed ever cease to be blest.

Oh, if we thought often of this “*ever*” and this “*never*,” how light and momentary would every suffering seem ; how little and how sweet would every labour be by which we might come to enjoy God for ever ! How far should we be from falling into any sin ! how fervent in good works ! and how well should we spend these moments on which an eternity depends ! Open Thou our eyes, of Thy infinite mercy, O Lord everlasting, that we may understand indeed how immense, how infinite, how happy, how miserable is this eternity ! And this moment of time which Thou hast given us in Thy mercy, grant that we may so live and so spend it, that it may profit us for eternity. Let us cry aloud in the ears of all, teach and preach it to all, that we may save the souls erring from the way leading to a happy eternity, and running headlong into the abyss of eternal woe ! Hear it, O Christian ! hear it, O pagans ! and all people in every portion of

the globe, all inhabitants to the ends of the earth, hear these three words : "*For ever !*" "*Never !*" and "*Eternity !*" Blessed are they who, now in heaven, taste of God's everlasting joys ! Happy they ! for to endless ages they shall praise Thee !

O eternity immeasurable in height, breadth and depth ! O eternity ! infinitude in height, infinitude in length, infinitude in depth ! O eternity ! On this thy passing moment of life, O brother, O sister pilgrim, depends either a life or death eternal : the Cross of Jesus Christ leads to life, the pleasures of this world lead to death. Choose which thou wilt ; thou art free to live or die, but remember that this thy life or death is eternal.

When thou hast come thus far in thought, dear reader, St. Chrysostom's words shall serve to bridle the fury of thy passions. "Tell me," says he, "how many hands hast thou ? Two. May heaven preserve them to thee ; but whereas thou hast two, if peradventure thou shouldst lose one, still the other remains. But how many souls hast thou ! If *two*, well and good : one lost, thou hast yet another. O merciful God ! thou hast but one soul, and that one soul is eternal. If this thou lovest, thou hast none other. If this thou gainest, it is to thee as a hundred thousand. If thou lose it, it is lost for ever ; if thou gain it, it is gained for ever ; once gained, it can be lost no more ; once lost, it can be gained no more." O Christian man ! where is thy faith ? where is thy reason ? Come, let us reckon together. Here is a dilemma thou canst not escape. Either thou believest in eternity, or thou dost not believe. If thou believest not, thou dost too much ; but if thou believest it—ah, then thou dost far

too little. Then for a few roods of earth, for a puff of the smoke of honour, for a moment's gratification, for some pieces of yellow dirt, for a few baubles out of the oyster shell, for these thou wilt have more loving regard than for thy poor soul, thine only and everlasting soul—nay, believe only, and I am content.

Then, if these few words seem to thee too tedious, who settest thy soul at the price of some filthy lucre or brutish pleasure, I would ask thee only to keep constant in thy memory these *four*, "*One soul*" and "*This eternal*." So when temptations assail thee or alluring objects entice thee, or thy senses beguile thee, with this shield of adamant thou shalt ward off the darts of thine enemy after the manner of that emperor who cut short the advice of an infidel politician by the great argument of eternity, which made him reckon little of his imperial crown in comparison, and say, "But what of my soul?" Oh, that every man and woman would often say to themselves, "But what of my soul? What of my one and only soul? What of my immortal soul?" Though thou wast as renowned as Alexander, as prosperous as Cæsar, as rich as Cræsus, beautiful as Absalom, strong as Samson, and beloved as Jonathan; though possessed of riches, honour, glory, and pleasure, and though prosperity should rain upon thee, and deluge thy house with good things, within a few fleeting days, at the hour of thy death, thou must needs perforce quit them all. And then, dear brother, what will become of thy soul, thy only and immortal soul? In fine, one of these conclusions is inevitable, either he has no faith, or is stark mad who lives in sin:

" *One eternal soul.*

" *Never. For ever. Eternity.*

" *Deliver my soul from the sword, O God :*

" *My only one from the power of the dog.*²

" *Save thy soul.*"³

" Souls that ne'er shall know decay
Scorn the moulds of mortal clay—
Brittle earthenware, that must
Quickly crumble into dust.
Souls immortal welcome pain
Heaven's eternal joys to gain ;
So to shine as sapphires bright
Ever living stars of light."

II.

ETERNITY OF THE BODY.

" *He that will save his life shall lose it, and he that shall lose his life for My sake, shall find it.*—St. Matt. x. 39.

THE second truth to be drawn from the consideration of eternity is a firm and fixed idea to treat the body ill, for the sake of treating it well, and to make it suffer, that it may not suffer. These two propositions, though at first, dear reader, they seem perhaps somewhat riddling and paradoxical, yet if thou examinest them by the rule of faith thou wilt find in them two practical and infallible truths—most potent for thy conversion—"Treat ill, that thou mayest treat well : Suffer, that it may not suffer." For believing as thou dost by the certainty of the faith in the resurrection of the body in the life to come, by the same certainty thou knowest that the bodies which have been well treated in this life with offence of God, must be for

² Psalm xxi. 21.

³ Gen. xix. 17.

ever ill treated in the next, and that the bodies which have been mortified in this life so as not to offend God shall be resuscitated to everlasting joys in the next. It follows, then, that he who ill-treats this flesh at the present time treats it well for eternity, and he who makes it suffer in this life frees it from suffering in the life to come; and if the title of this consideration seem to thee strange or paradoxical, "The Eternity of the Body," correct the error of thy imagination, and remember that although thy body must be the food of worms, and within the space of a few short days must return to its dust, yet at the day of doom this same flesh, the very and identical same, must rise again and be reunited with thy soul, to be no more again severed, and to die no more; a truth which, profoundly meditated on, opens in the heart of the just a fountain of delight, and in the soul of the sinner a gush of bitter gall. The just rejoices when he remembers that there is prepared for his flesh, after a momentary suffering, an eternal recompense; and the sinner trembles to think that for his body which he has loved so much there is prepared, after the pleasures of a moment, an eternal punishment.

Oh, would to heaven that the thought of eternity would produce perpetually among Christian people that true transfiguration which befell a thoughtless youth, who, while pursuing a phantom of the imagination, and building castles in the air, was led, without purposing to do so, to raise a solid mansion of eternal salvation. He one day, as idlers are wont to do, to while away his time, gave free scope to his fancy, and said thus within himself, Oh, what a happy lot and a merry life is mine, could it last for ever! could it never end and my felicity be preserved per-

petual ! I have wealth and friends enough ; I dress and fare sumptuously, and am honourably attended ; I give my sensual appetites every gratification. These pleasures, it is true, are accompanied with some bitter-nesses, but that in fine which gives me most pain in the midst of my delights, is the thought that with death they must all end. O death ! that I could do away with thee, and that I could enjoy for ever this world, and fulfil for ever all my desires ! Oh, that I could live for ever !

Then he pushed further his reverie. But suppose, he said, an angel came down from heaven and gave me in *carte blanche* this free choice. To live six hundred years, and of these, twenty-five years in prison and excessive misery, and then the rest of the time in the fulness of every pleasure ; or on the other hand, twenty-five years in the fulness of every pleasure and the rest at the bottom of a dreadful dungeon eating the bread of affliction and drinking the water of tears ; what would be my resolve ? Without doubt I would choose the first unless I were a stark fool. What are twenty-five years in comparison with hundreds ? And with twenty-five years of patience I should obtain five hundred and seventy-five years of delight. Twenty-five years I should be badly off, and five hundred and seventy-five I should be well off.

When he had arrived at this point a happy inspiration from heaven flashed across his mind, and struck like an arrow into his heart, and he heard a voice within saying, Ah, poor wretch ! dost thou not see that out of thine own mouth thou art convicted ? Be they a hundred years and not a poor twenty-five which thou hast yet to live, and be it that in these everything were granted thee that thy heart could

desire, but after these what does the Catholic faith teach thee has to follow? Not six hundred; not six hundred thousand, nor six hundred millions of years, but ages everlasting, in which thou wilt lie dying in endless torments and pains infinitely greater than the mind of man can conceive. Is this, thinkest thou, a good bargain? Is it a compact fair and equal?

This sum of reckoning proposed to him from heaven made him resolve not to play the foolish merchant by such a bargain with this world. Oh, how sweet would the thought of eternity make the mortification of our flesh to be if it never departed from our mind, or at least, if at times it dwelt in our thoughts now and then! Christian, if thou valuest, I do not say thy soul, but thy body, I pray thee consider often these words: Short life—eternal life—short pain—eternal joy—short joy—eternal pain. If the flesh complain of fasting, give it comfort with the thought that it will sit down for ever at the table of God. If it grieve at being poorly clad, console it with the thought of robes of immortality. If it lament at suffering, dry its tears with the thoughts of everlasting joys.

Zeuxis, the famous painter of old, being asked why he was so long in painting a picture, replied, "I am long in painting because I paint for eternity." Let the body well understand that its paintings are for everlasting, that every pain endured for the love of God is a touch of the pencil for the picture of a blessed eternity, and every mortal sin committed is a touch of the pencil for a picture of a miserable eternity. On that account I would that in spiritual life there were made discovery of that perpetual motion for which philosophers seek in vain in physics,

that our eyes were ever being, now lifted up, now down, accompanied with a continual raising of our heart and mind, while the words were always whispered on our tongue, "Heaven—hell—day—night—joy—sorrow—life—death—death without life—life without death—joy without sorrow—sorrow without joy—night without day—day without night—night and day—joy and sorrow—life and death—everlasting!"

And here, good reader, we are not speaking of profound spiritual things, such as thou mayest protest thou canst not understand, as being too subtle for thy dull apprehension, we are reasoning about thy body, thy flesh, thy limbs, and thy senses, which thou lovest so well ; and we say to this thy flesh, thy body, thy members, thy senses, within a few fleeting days of mortal life, or rather of living death, there must befall thee eternal day or eternal night, eternal pain or eternal joy, eternal life or eternal death, either hell for ever or heaven for ever !

Hold then, dear reader, this converse with thy body, and say to it, Remember, O my body ! that thou art eternal, and that thou livest to be either happy or miserable for ever. O mine eyes ! offend not God with your looks, for ye are eternal. O my hands ! labour for the love of God, for ye are eternal. Walk, O my feet ! in the way of the Commandments of God, for ye are eternal. Hearken, O my ears ! to the Word of God, for ye are eternal. . Mortify thyself, my flesh, and do penance, for thou art eternal.

Thus shall we preach to our senses, as Christ preached to the multitude of his disciples who followed Him in language not registered in the Gospel but related by St. Clement of Alexandria—be "*Good money-changers.*" Test the coin you take at its true

value. Give the poor price of this vile body, which is not worth a penny piece, for the inestimable riches of eternity, or rather, value this your body at a high rate, and instead of earthenware make it gold; for if now that it is clay ye trample on it well, when it is resuscitated in the life to come ye will find it changed to gold.

These few words, if thy bosom be not hard as the nether mill-stone, will so pierce with their shafts thy heart that they will open in it a living wound, and thou wilt think with admiration on the body of St. Laurence roasted on the persecutors' gridiron, and on his heart enflamed with Divine love, and with St. Augustine thou wilt understand that "*We can buy happiness in this life, but here we cannot have it;*" and "*If the grain of corn falling into the earth die, it produceth much fruit.*"¹

" Pearls shall be the tears you shed,
Drops of blood be rubies red,
Penitential zone of hair
Shall be raiment rich and rare.
Brighter than the Indian gem
Sorrows weave a diadem.
Then with liberal hand and free
Sow the seeds of hours that flee,
Heavenly harvests shall repay
Toils of but a fleeting day."

¹ St. John xii. 25.

III.

ETERNITY OF HEAVEN.

"Our affliction, which at present is light and momentary, worketh in us above measure an exceeding great weight of glory."—2 Cor. iv. 17.

THE third maxim of salvation to be drawn from the consideration of eternity is a deliberate resolve to part with a present nothing to gain all in all, to give death for life, the present for the future, time for eternity, and earth for heaven. Oh, how truly spake Sir Thomas More: "Many men with one half the pains at which they purchase perdition, could, if they would, obtain everlasting life."

Here we say nothing of the greatness of the glory of heaven; our only present point is to speak of its eternity. But we would exhort thee, dear reader, to ponder well the sentence of St. Augustine, that for one day in heaven all the pains of the present life would be well bestowed, and to consider attentively what the blessed Alan records of a certain Religious who died of a very sore infirmity, and who, by the permission of God, appeared in glory to one of her acquaintance, and among other things said, "Oh, my dear friend, how great is the glory which my God of His goodness gives me in heaven! But I would have you know that to gain so much more as is merited only by one 'Hail Mary!' said even without extraordinary devotion, I would willingly return to suffer again my sickness which was so sore, and pass through the agony of death."

And certainly if this most incalculable recompense which God gives to His elect were ever to have an end, the folly of those who neglect it might in some

manner be held excusable, but this reward is infinite and is *eternal*. Therefore, whereas all the delights of earthly sweets are dashed by the thought that they must end, the joys of heaven are on this sole account inestimable, because they shall have no end. O my God! how little does it cost to win this eternity of infinite good! Eternal Lord! what tears are worthy to weep for this our misery? We are created for heaven, and yet we seldom or never lift up our eyes to look to our home ~~and~~ consider that heaven is eternal.

If it were well thought on that heaven were eternal all the world would be saints. What does a man not do to heap up riches? to what dangers does he not expose himself to gratify a lewd passion? what toils does he not endure to mount to the precipice of honour's dizzy height? And yet on all these things which men and women so idly covet, God has let fall bitter drops of gall, and has set as bounds to the raging seas of our wanton thoughts a handful of dust. To-day we make a show, to-morrow we are gone and our place knows us no more. Oh, how many—alas! how many there are who make the foolish exchange of the gold of heaven for the filth of earth!

With this thought, had we the eloquent pen of St. Eucherius we should, as with a chain of gold, draw captive slaves of eternity the hearts of all men. "What price is it," says he, "that persuades a man to buy the merchandise of eternal perdition and part with eternal blessedness? Surely it is fools' pains; for this cannot be called a bargain: a bargain is by parting with a little to gain much. But we, silly souls that we are, turn all our interests topsy-turvy, and

give the last place in our thoughts to that which should hold the first, or rather, which should not have the first but the only place. If thou lovest life, love life everlasting. If thou seekest it, seek it for eternity."

St. Philip Neri appeared in glory after his death to a person who held him in high esteem, and pointing to a pathway behind him all set with briars and thorns, said, "This is the path which leads to heaven. He that will gather the roses of heaven must prick his fingers with the thorns of earth."

The same saint, when offered a cardinal's hat, began to run the contrary way, exclaiming, "Heaven! heaven!" "Learn by these examples," says St. Eucherius again, "that no folly can be greater than to give all thy care to the briefest of moments and to give no thought to the long everlasting!"

*"We look for a city that hath foundations."*²

"Home eternal on thy shore
Stormy billows break no more.
Heavy laden is my heart
Fain from load of earth to part,
Hailing thee with suppliant cry,
Lovely city of the sky!
Sighing for thy sweet abode,
Palace of the Living God."

² Heb. xi. 10.

IV.

ETERNITY OF HELL.

"Which of you can dwell with devouring fire? Who can dwell with everlasting burnings?"—Isaiah xxxiii. 14.

THE fourth and last lesson of salvation drawn from the consideration of eternity, and which is perhaps the first in potency to break hard hearts of stone, is to descend into hell, and there in thought to enter alive into that abyss of torments that we may not be trailed thither by devils' hands after death and dwell there for ever. O word great and terrible to utter—"hell!" "Let them descend alive," says David, "into hell," "that they may not," adds St. Bernard, "descend after death." This physic is a dose consisting of a simple ingredient, but sufficient to purge out all the corruption of the heart of man, and to restore it to a healthy state of grace. "Let us think well of the pains of hell," says St. Chrysostom, "for the thought of hell will not permit us to fall into hell," and I might add that, had every man and woman a lively faith and recollection of hell, there would have been, and would be, no souls there. Great God! it is so full because men have so little faith and so little thought of it.

In the north of England there died a man of the name of Drithelm, who by permission of God returned to life after having seen the pains of hell. His life afterwards was such as to make all men aware that he had been dead and had seen hell. He not only fasted rigorously many days together, clothed himself in hair-cloth, and girded himself with a pointed iron chain, took discipline to blood, and lay upon the bare

ground, but sought every occasion for suffering, plunging his body for many hours of the night in freezing water up to the neck, and burning his flesh with hot coals. So that some men of prudence, not approving of his manner of penance, reprehended him as indiscreet in thus treating his body with overmuch rigour, and as one that would destroy himself; but he with words very moving, and fetching sighs, would reply with tears: "I have seen worse things than these." O my God! "Tell me, hardened sinners," says St. Jerome, "when you hear the words, Fire, ice, sulphur, stench, worms, scorpions, torments, pains, crosses, anguish, devils, and hell to all eternity, what conceptions do you form of these? Perhaps you think of them as of a painted stage and play, all drawn by fancy, or as the exaggeration of a heated preacher, as a fable sung by poets to amuse you. But no, there is no merry jesting where these pains are."

Tell me, again, is your flesh of brass or your body of iron? You must suppose that your frames are to be of adamant in the next world, while in this you have not courage to walk one half quarter of an hour with bare feet upon burning coals. And will you have courage to be buried for all eternity in a furnace of fire, compared with which the fires of this earth are as extinguished embers?

O hell, eternal hell! So many fall into thee, and so few think of thee! Therefore one may be bold to say that men and women are worse and more contrary to all order than the devils, "for the devils," says St. Cyril, "tremble at the name of hell—the very devils fear it." And yet a man or woman is not afraid.

Christian, for the love of thine own soul, give a

moment's time, though thou ride post-haste to hell, to read these brief similitudes. In thought sever from eternity a hundred thousand years, or a thousand million of ages—thinkest thou that one jot is taken from eternity? Take again thousands of millions—hast thou found the Alpha, not to say the Omega, of eternity? Take again as many millions of ages as there are stars in heaven, drops of water in the sea, and motes in the air, and particles of dust in the earth—dost thou suppose thou hast diminished one moment from eternity? It remains as entire, in height, length, depth, and breadth, as immeasurable, as interminable, as infinite as it was before, so much so that if God were to propose this offer to the Lost, that the whole space between earth and heaven should be nothing else than the finest sand, and that every hundred thousand million of ages an angel should come and take away a grain, and that when the last grain of sand should be taken away after the course of that unimaginable period of ages, then their pains should have an end, those unhappy souls would esteem themselves blessed at hearing this sentence, and scarce would feel that torment of intolerable pain. They would pause and say, "Our torment, it is true, is great, and cannot be greater, but yet it will have an end." Woe, woe, so many years, so many ages past, so countless, as we have said, and yet neither the end nor the middle nor the beginning of eternity! "Unhappy sinner," says the devout Alvar, "thou wilt be punished a thousand years, and then a thousand thousand, and after a thousand thousand, as if thou hadst not begun, thou wilt again anew be tormented for an endless space of ages, and thou shalt think of no multitude of times in which an infinite continuance

shall not still remain in which thou shalt be punished." Sometimes, methinks, if one could look down from the height of heaven and behold what men and women created for heaven are doing—what are their employments and what their thoughts, how strange would be the spectacle ! One is lamenting for the loss of the breath of honour, another wallowing in sensuality, another is gathering together the thorny bundles of riches, but few, how few, aspire to good which is truly good and which is eternal. Hell has its gates wide open : the greater part of men and women live slaves to the devil ; all flesh has corrupted its way, and countless souls enter that abyss of pains never to come forth again—souls for which Christ shed His Blood and gave His life. Is not this misery most pitiful, and to be wept for with tears of blood, ye servants of God who have a zeal for His glory ?

Believe me, dear brother or sister, if thou didst think well on this, it would be impossible for thee to determine to accept, for the bitter intoxication of one brief pleasure, an eternity of pain. If from the bottom of hell, by the permission of God, Judas were dragged up by devils, loaded with chains of fire, as he is in hell, all pale and ghastly, rotten, leprous, stinking, filthy, and abominable, all wounds, sores, pains, and in incredible torments, what horror would seize upon the soul ! Imagine, then, that he is all this before thee. Ask him thus : Tell me, Judas, what pains are these, and what are the punishments thou endurest ? How many years hast thou been in hell, and how many ages must thou remain yet more below, buried there amongst the damned ? Our pains, he would reply, are most grievous and continuous, never-ceasing and eternal ; the least one of our pains surpasses all

those together that ever the injustice of man or the justice of God has inflicted on mankind. And though the thorns which pierce us are so sharp, yet would they seem in comparison like roses, were there but a hope of comfort or repose, or could they have an end. We are without hope of ever again escaping from torments so horrible : never for one hour, never for one single moment shall we cease to be tormented, within and without, in body and soul, night and day, amid darkness, smoke, sulphur, fire, and stench, and amid the devils. You rest at your ease and we are in the fire ; you laugh, and we are in the fire ; you take your meals, and we are in the fire ; you take your pastimes, and we lie in the fire—and oh, woful wretches ! never one poor quarter of an hour shall we be freed from our torments ! our torments are eternal. I have now been in them more than eighteen hundred years, and Cain more than five thousand, and yet neither end nor middle nor beginning of our sufferings has come ; but whilst God is God, Judas shall still be damned and Cain shall be in the fire, and all the Lost shall be tormented.

Christian reader, by the bowels of mercy of Jesus Christ and by the love thou bearest to thine own soul, read and read again, think and think again of what is here written, and often ask of thy body, thy soul, thy senses, “Which of you can dwell with devouring fire and with everlasting burnings ?” And how is it possible that I, who am so sensitive that I cannot bear a crease in the bedclothes for a night, or by day the sting of a gnat, can endure for all eternity those burnings, those flames, that fire, those most grievous pains and torments incomprehensible to the mind of man, and above all *eternal* ?

In the last century a good priest converted a woman of the world by these two words repeated several times emphatically, "*Hell and Never!*" "*Hell and Never!*" O brothers and sisters, pilgrims in this world—"Hell and Never, Heaven and Ever." If once thou enterest into heaven, thou shalt possess that supreme good without fear of ever losing it for all eternity. But if once thou fallest into hell, thou canst not for all eternity come out from thence. "Hell and never more. Heaven and evermore." He that does not wake at the rolling of this thunder, says St. Augustine, is not asleep, but dead—

"Weigh for me the weight of fire."

"Sinner, if thou fear'st to prove
Feeble flames on earth above,
Mocker, wilt thou dare to dwell
'Mid the nether fires of hell !
Think, O think, how brief the time !
Weep and wash away thy crime.
One lost soul would fill a sea
Weeping for eternity."

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